

CONTEMPLATING THE GOSPEL ...

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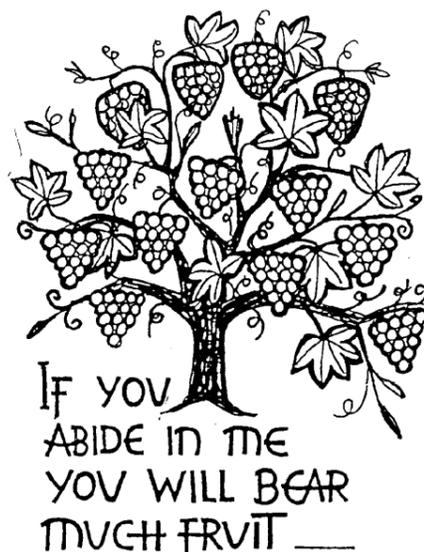
Again and again, life's experiences teach us that, as members of the Earth community, we cannot make it on our own. We need one another, other living beings, the sun, the soil, the water and everything else that formed from exploding stars in the distant past. The gospel reading reminds us that as baptised Christians we are not just intimately interlinked but that the source of our unity is the Risen Christ. As limbs and leaves and sap of the same vine, we simply cannot survive in isolation.

The vine image picks up one of the most potent biblical images for God's relationship to the people of Israel. It is an image of life and growth, of colour and vibrancy. It holds the promise of a life-sustaining grape harvest that is ultimately transformed into wine, the biblical symbol for joy. God brought Israel "the vine" out of Egypt (Psalm 80:9). For the prophet Isaiah, Israel is also a vineyard planted and nurtured by God (5:1-7; 27:3). For Jeremiah, Israel is the choice vine "of fully tested stock" planted by God (2:21).

The Johannine Jesus makes the claim: "I am the true vine/vineyard" and God is the "vinegrower". He goes further: "I am the vine/vineyard and you are the branches". The potency of this image resides in the fact that a vine without branches is inconceivable. It draws us into the mystery of the mutual interchange of life between us and the risen Christ, into the mystery of God. It also invites us to acknowledge our interconnection with the whole of the Earth community, to nurture the wonderful biodiver-

sity of our planet, and to accept the inevitability of "pruning" if we are to "bear fruit" and "become disciples".

"Pruning" can take various forms. A chance encounter, a sudden inspiration, a word from a friend, an unexpected illness, a confronting story: any such experience can bring us to our senses and serve as a "pruning" device. The first reading for today recounts the story of Saul of Tarsus who is "pruned" quite dramatically through his encounter with the Risen Christ on the



road to Damascus. He is transformed from persecutor to defender of Christ and Christ's followers. Saul becomes a disciple and "bears much fruit".

The Greek-speaking Christian Jews are suspicious, even murderous, when he tries to preach the gospel among them. Peace ensues, however, and the movement takes hold in the regions where Jesus had first preached the gospel. It is worth reflecting on the cultural

diversity that characterised earliest Christianity and the tensions that had to be resolved between different language groups or groups of different ethnic origin for the gospel to flourish and bear fruit. John's gospel is written against the backdrop of such "pruning" within the early communities. Sometimes the requisite "pruning" is hearing respectfully a point of view that differs from one's own.

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When I first met my friend Josh we were living in a boarding house called Ascot Lodge in Hoddle Street. It was quite a good boarding house but when Launch Housing took over, they opened the doors to heroin addicts. I admit that many of the people who have really inspired me and that I've looked up to have been heroin addicts. But I've never been a heroin addict. Heroin addicts who are not artists, who don't have a higher purpose in life other than to do heroin, are really s**t people.

I will get around to reading William S Burroughs' *Naked lunch* but I'm focussed on biographies at the moment, like this one I'm reading right now: *Roman Polanski: a biography*, by Thomas Kiernan.

There's been a massive change in Fitzroy. I had a girlfriend who was a hairdresser. She said that guys keep the haircut from their favourite time of their lives. I didn't. I just kept living in Fitzroy.

Josh

I've made some good choices in life for the situation and person I am now. I've evolved into this style of life. Some people with houses step out of their houses just to pick on homeless people or people living in the street. I came from the Huon Valley in Tasmania. I met my dad when I was 14. That felt weird. I haven't been on Facebook so I'm not in contact. I've got a wall and a page but I'm not on social media anymore. My dad's from the midlands, Oatlands and Bothwell. Mum's South Australian.

I smoke marijuana. I don't go near injectable drugs. I was at one time shooting stuff into my veins. I don't want to smoke marijuana anymore; I'm over it. People who see us here say, 'Well, get a house! You should have budgeted, you should have made the right choices in life.' You don't get respect from sleeping on the street. Junkies see you do one psychotic act and they come up and ask you if you need junk. Are you chasing? Do you need something? Oh, you should try this. You should try ice. They're pressuring you. The doctor said I had schizophrenia. Paranoid psychosis. It's not drug-induced. But marijuana is not helping me. When I was going through a court trial the magistrate said, 'Look Josh, you know marijuana is illegal. Just slow down your use.' I'm on Newstart Allowance. I applied for the Disability Support Pension but they knocked me back. I have applied lots of times. My job provider has been giving me exemptions from looking for work.

Stations of the Resurrection at Saint Mark's:



Wednesday 2 May
12 noon
Tuesday 8 May
5.00 pm

'Resurrection' from Way of Light—Stations of the Resurrection © Sr Mary Stephen CRSS and McCrimmon Publishing Co. Ltd

PARISH NEWS

EASTER FLOWERS



Fr Stuart has been decorating the paschal candle stand and providing flowers for Our Lady and at the Shrine for Saint Mark.

If you would like to contribute to the cost of these in thanksgiving for someone or something in your life ... please use the envelopes at the back of the church. You will see these tributes are being recognised on the front page of the pew bulletin. **Thank you to all those who have already made donations.**

WORKS IN THE CHURCH

A timber predella has been built between the liturgical east side of the altar and the reredos steps. The stain matches the steps of the reredos. Predella is the liturgical term to describe a step or platform on which the altar is placed or adjacent to it.



Other work in progress is the construction of a couple of other platforms to rationalise and make safe parts of the church where there are height differences.

During the week new locks were installed on some of the new doors installed earlier this year. These have been calibrated to fit in with our in-house proprietary keying system.

AROUND THE PARISH ... AND THE WORK OF OUR COMMUNITY CENTRE

These personal accounts appeared in Melbourne Catholics—April 2018 edition.

Our Community Centre works each weekday to assist people who 'sleep rough', are homeless, or have needs to assist them to get by, get a good feed and shower and wash clothes or talks to restore their dignity. These two personal stories are of two men who have slept in the precinct at various times and know our service well. God loves them! Dr Roberta Shaw, writer, researcher and independent publisher assisted in the recording of these personal accounts.

Kirk

I love being homeless; it's a protest. But I'm still part of the community. People love Homeless Kirk. I think I'm the best in the business at begging and 'gathering alms'. If you don't own your own home, then you're homeless too. Not owning your own home is the definition. 'Homelessness' is completely different to 'living rough', which is what I'm clearly doing. At this time in my life, I'm living like this and I'm enjoying it. I hide behind this wall here at Saint Mark's Anglican Church in Fitzroy. I want the community to know I'm here, but I don't want to draw unwanted attention to myself. I don't understand the people that sleep on main streets or sleep in the city. Aren't there quiet little parks everywhere that you can sleep in?

I'm 46 years old. I've been here since about the 6th of December last year. Before that, I stayed at my cousin's place for a couple of nights. Before that, I was living with a friend in Pascoe Vale for three weeks. You give up your privacy when you become a homeless person. It was a dream of mine to become a homeless person. There was a show on the ABC about this guy who was a banker, I think he had a nervous break-down, and he just started walking along roads. He wasn't even collecting any sort of welfare payments. He was like Forrest Gump; he just walked. He picked up discarded food on the side of the road and got by doing that. Journalist Ray Martin hunted him down and introduced him to his family who had always wondered what happened to him. His story really affected me.

People give me enough money every day to get a packet of cigarettes, a gram of pot and a bottle of wine. They give me a lot of bananas; maybe they think my potassium levels are deficient. I think my potassium levels are dangerously high! At St Mary's House of Welcome the food is s**t.

I've always been 'left of centre' and 'on the outskirts'. The commercial world repulses me. I honestly believe I'm a street performer. In the TV show *Sesame Street* there's a song; 'Who are the people in your neighbourhood, in your neighbourhood?' Well, a homeless person is a person in your neighbourhood, in your neighbourhood. *Sesame Street* audiences accepted Oscar the Grouch and there was nothing to like about him! But I'm like the woolly-mammoth creature, Mr Snuffleupagus. He was the imaginary friend of Big Bird. Everyone in the community thought that Mr Snuffleupagus was a figment of Big Bird's imagination.

TV is dreadful. I don't miss it. Part of the reason I'm a homeless person is that I'm lazy. It's so easy to just turn on the TV and watch s**t. When I was fully-addicted to TV I listened to Red Hot Chili Peppers 'Throw away your television':

*Throw away your television
Time to make this clean decision
Master waits for its collision now
It's a repeat of a story told
It's a repeat and it's getting old.*

Red Simons (former ABC Radio Melbourne Breakfast presenter) is a big fan of what I do. I used to be a door-to-door salesman and so I encountered him in that role. I was selling tickets to a stand-up comedy venue.

I'm quite a private person. That's the thing I struggle with the most—in Saint Mark's they've got a bathroom that is just for homeless people which is open between 11am and 3pm. There's only one toilet and the three showers face the toilet in an open fashion. I'm not a 'nudging up in front of other blokes' sort of guy.

I'm going to try to do 'living rough' for a year. But this is really 'living moist' or 'living wet' when it's not just urban camping. That Red Hot Chili Pepper's song 'Under the bridge' is about how you love the place that you belong:

*Sometimes I feel
Like my only friend
Is the city I live in
The city of angels
Lonely as I am
Together we cry*

I love Fitzroy, North Fitzroy, Collingwood and Clifton Hill. It's a spiritual thing and I'm not a spiritual person at all. I have a spiritual connection to this land—Australia—but mainly Victoria. I was born at the Western General. My friend Josh would be hard-pressed to ever buy a house. And it's not because he's a bad person. He just doesn't have the skills or aptitude for those sorts of aspirations. It's terrible because he deserves the rewards of our social progression as much as anyone else.

I get Centrelink but I've had my payments cut off. I failed to attend an appointment at the job service provider and because it was the second time in six months, I lost \$270 out of my payment, which is a big chunk when you only get \$540 a fortnight. I've got another letter in my pocket saying they're going to cut off some more payments. It took an hour and ten minutes to get through to Centrelink on the phone.

I'm Indigenous; Grandpa was Indigenous. I was dyslexic as a child. It crushes your self-confidence. I've got my own bed; I've got two beds actually! This mattress was part of an Ikea sofa-bed.

If I didn't have to beg every day I'd do my art because I'm an artist. I want to create my own fake roadside memorial for myself, Homeless Kirk. I'd go to a florist and get all the old flowers, I'd tie them around a tree, and everyone would look at it and go, 'There's no way anyone killed themselves running into that tree!' I'd buy a whole lot of cards and do different handwriting and put them there.

FR STUART WRITES ...

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SAINT MARK'S DAY FESTIVITIES

What a wonderful celebration we had on our Patronal Feast Day last Wednesday!

The Festive Mass was splendid and beautiful with the choir in good voice and the servers, as usual, prayerful and attentive.

It was good to welcome Bishop Graeme Rutherford back to preach. Many people enjoyed his homily and it will be available for those of you who would like to read it again.



*Fr Stuart and Bishop Graeme
at the Spit Roast Dinner*



*Kate Cherry captured this great shot of the
Liturgical Ministers preparing to leave the sanctuary at the
end of the Mass*

Jacque Joslin, Louise and Michael McGuire and Heather Stock helped create a fun and sociable Spit Roast Dinner following the Mass.

EASTER CAROLS

The next big event in the Church Calendar is our annual celebration of Easter set within the ancient office of Evening Prayer ... a form that dates to the earliest Christian era.

Would you please do your best to promote this to your families and friends? See page 4 for details.



FLOWERS and SIMNEL CAKES

Thank you to those who have donated money towards the 'living flowers' which we have purchased to decorate the church in this Easter Time.

I am also grateful to Tom Mosby and Tony Ellwod and Jacque Joslin for offering to bake simnel cakes for Mothers' Day on 13 May.

DOROTHY SOLEY

Thank you to all who have offered prayers, moral support and kind words this past week for my mother. Dorothy has a number of complex health issues and continues in hospital undergoing various tests and treatments.



EASTER CAROLS

**AN EVENING CELEBRATION OF
THE SEASON OF EASTER
IN READINGS & MUSIC**

**SING
CHRIST
RISEN!**

**SUNDAY
13 MAY
6PM**

**SAIN+
MARKS
FITZROY**

**ST MARK'S ANGLICAN CHURCH
GEORGE ST, FITZROY**

PRUNING

Every branch that bears no fruit, the Father takes away, and every branch that bears fruit he prunes so that it may bear even more fruit. John 15:1-2

These words help me put a new perspective on suffering. They help me to think about painful rejections, moments of loneliness, feelings of inner darkness and despair, lack of support and human affection as God's pruning. I am aware that I might have settled too soon for the few fruits that I can recognise in my life. I might say, 'Well, I am doing some good here and there, and I should be grateful and content with the little good I do.' but that might be false modesty and even a form of spiritual laziness. God calls me to more. God wants to prune me. a pruned vine does not look beautiful, but during harvest time it produces much fruit. The great challenge is to continue to recognise God's pruning hand in my life. Then I can avoid resentment and depression and become even more grateful that I am called to bear even more fruit than I thought I could. Suffering then becomes a true way of purification and allows me to rejoice in the fruits with deep gratitude and without pride.

In what spirit do I accept suffering in my life?

Do I feel I never need any 'pruning'?

Prayer is a good way to share my suffering with the One who can and will share it.

(Henri Nouwen, *Returning: God's Love Calls Us Home*, p. 9.)

From: Charles Ringma, *Hear the Ancient Wisdom: Daily Readings from the Early Church to the Reformation*
London: SPCK, 2013, p.129 →

Surprises in God's Kingdom

It is so easy for religious people to become self-righteous. They think they are better and more favoured than others. But the God of abundant grace may well lift a terrible sinner out of the ash heap of a decadent life while a religious person languishes in his or her shallow religiosity.

While some Christians are more openhearted and generous in their attitude towards other people, others are more rigid and intolerant. The latter attitude is often helped by fundamentalists who know exactly how others should be and act. This can lead to a judgmentalism that factors out the triumph of God's grace.

The biblical story clearly points us in a very different direction. An insignificant people are raised up to bear God's witness to the surrounding nations. People who practice justice are in God's orbit more than those who make abundant burnt offerings. The poor rather than the religious establishment hear the words of Jesus with gladness of heart. And pagans are ushered into the faith rather than those to whom it was first offered.

This very long story demonstrates how God works in unusual and surprising ways. God's way is the way of the upside-down kingdom.

The unknown author of *The Cloud of Unknowing* knows this vision. 'And yet it often happens that some who have been hardened, habitual sinners arrive at the perfection of this work sooner than those who have never sinned grievously. God is truly wonderful in lavishing his grace on anyone he chooses.' the author highlights God's surprising ways.

Thought

See others through the eyes of God's great generosity. And see yourself not as a person of entitlement, but as a hungry person seeking bread and wine