A photograph of a forest path with sunlight rays filtering through the trees, creating a warm and serene atmosphere. The path is covered in fallen leaves and leads into the distance where a small figure can be seen.

St Mary's Matters

Into a New Decade 2020

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Vale Uncle Sam



We mourn the death of our beloved Uncle Sam Watson.

The huge send off for him at Musgrave Park was testimony to the number of people whose lives he touched. He was a leader for our times and his life demonstrated his commitment to justice - firstly for his people but also for society generally.

Our love goes out to Cathy and all of Sam's family and friends. We will miss him at SMX where he was much loved.

From the Editor

It seems very appropriate as we move into a new decade that we include in this edition of our magazine some of those wonderful homilies (adapted a little for this genre) that we heard last year. Each one could be found helpful as we begin a new era in our lives because they suggest new ways of looking at our lives and the world,

We hear the homilies once and then generally not again. The wisdom to be found in each of them is worth reading and mulling over. I am very grateful to those writers as well as the others who have contributed to our magazine. We are blessed with good writers and thinkers in this community and a purpose of having this magazine is to give us a chance to read what they have to say.

The new decade is filled with huge challenges. It is easy to succumb to despair when we think about it. I hope when you have finished reading the ideas presented in this edition you will feel more hopeful and be ready to do your bit to improve the world around you.

Watching and Waiting

Wisdom from Advent

I sat down to watch the recent ABC program on Ben Quilty the artist....As the program unfolded, I felt I was a witness to someone who watches, waits and then acts through painting. As he told the stories that moved him, especially the slaughter of Australian Aboriginal people in the Myall Creek Massacre, it felt as though I became subsumed into those stories and experiences and I realized more profoundly that our world continues its watching and waiting

Somewhere out there are Aboriginal People still in pain watching and waiting for truth telling of their history.



Somewhere out there is a farmer scraping the dry earth as he watches and waits for a sign of rain.

Somewhere out there are fire fighters, landowners, people in homes watching and waiting in fear as they hear the news of bushfires coming closer.

Somewhere out there at this moment, there is a mother-to-be who watches and waits as a new little life grows within her.

Somewhere out there – on Christmas Island – so far from daily life in Australia, there is a family watching and waiting in agony for some glimmer of compassion from the Australian Government that will allow them to remain in Biloela.

Somewhere out there is a teacher who works with few resources trying her or his best, watching and waiting to see some glimmer of love of learning from students so preoccupied with the seduction of their digital online world.

Somewhere out there is a man or woman, watching and waiting for the time when they may come out to family and friends and meet acceptance of their true gender identity.

Somewhere out there is a person in a hospice surrounded by loved ones watching and waiting and maybe dreading or accepting the moment when their breath is no more.

Someone out there is a person on Newstart who has no more money from their Allowance watching, waiting and scrounging until the next payment is due.

Somewhere out there in a Refugee Camp is a young woman waiting and watching – too young to have mothered three children but frightened of what might be ahead of her.

Somewhere out there is a Benedictine Monk or Sister praying quietly watching and waiting for the dawn to arrive.

Advent is about watching and waiting. Who wants to watch the world as it is today, with so many flash points, continuing obscene inequality – of resources, education, health and opportunity? Who wants to be reminded that the global number of refugees has surpassed 50 million for the first time since World War Two? Has there really been a time when we were more fearful about the future of the world, as we look lovingly on our children and grandchildren? It's petrifying, a sure recipe for depression. I mean, what can we actually do about any of it? Surely there must be a remedy for our frustration and anger.

Is there really any benefit in reminding ourselves that some things need waiting for, and that patience is a virtue? After all, it takes a certain time for a baby to fully develop in the womb or a wound to heal: that's just how it is. But 'peace on earth': it seems that we'll be waiting forever.

Which brings us to the really big challenge of Advent. Hope. Watching and waiting in hope as we simply try to slow down a bit and to deepen our faith journey in quieter, more sombre ways.

Advent is about learning to wait. It is about not having to know exactly what is coming tomorrow, only that whatever it is, some hard, some uplifting, is sign of the work of God alive in us. We are becoming as we go.

We learn in Advent to stay in the present, knowing that only the present well lived can possibly lead us to the fullness of life.

Waiting reminds us that this is God's story and it reminds us, slaps us in the face at times, that we are not the centre of the story. It's not about us, and things don't always (often!) go the way we'd like. Finally, all the waiting helps us think differently about both the present and the future: valuing the present as a gift, cherishing the future as our ultimate hope.

We can look to the story of Mary, the young Jewish girl who watched and waited for the birth of her child and yet while questioning and not understanding, turned her watching

Continued on page 4

USSR

I grew up in the age of the cold war. Things were simpler then. We and our friends were the good guys, and the USSR were the bad guys. We had free elections and they didn't. But when one looked at the leaders the free elections threw up, like Joh Bjelke-Petersen, it did make you wonder if free elections were such a good idea.

What really showed up the difference, was people on the wrong side of politics. In Australia, they sat around looking glum, talking about the next election. In the USSR, anyone even suspected of having the wrong opinions was imprisoned in concentration camps in Siberia. You could argue the toss about elections, but this was the fatal flaw of the bad guys. There were people locked up there indefinitely, people who had done nothing wrong, and who did not know if they were ever going to be let out. You could see the Soviets subconsciously knew they were doing the wrong thing,

because no reporters or foreign officials were allowed to visit the camps. If the Soviets really thought they were doing right, they would have been happy to show people, who would congratulate them on the good job they were doing. But it was not like that – what went on in the camps was secret, and proved the bad guys were bad.

Now we no longer have the cold war. Thank God. The USSR no longer exists, and its innocent prisoners are released. But things have changed amongst the good guys too. Now it is Australia that imprisons people indefinitely, on Nauru. People who have done nothing wrong. In fact people who have shown unusual bravery and determination. How can my country behave like the USSR of old? How can my country be doing this?

It is no longer my country.

Peter Brown



Children in Siberian Concentration camp



Family in detention centre

Watching and Waiting

Continued from page 3

and waiting into action – coming together with her elderly pregnant cousin, Elizabeth....

To me, this is the real message of our Advent watching and waiting. We must take time to watch, wait and yearn...but even in darkness may we, like that young Mary of Nazareth transform our watching and waiting into action. We reflect on the great example given to us in Mary's Magnificat...Mary's song. This is a truly wonderful prayer and we can make it ours, knowing:

.... that Mary's watching and waiting became praise of God within her

...that Mary's watching and waiting reminded her that she was not in control

...that Mary's watching and waiting urged her to see the many gifts around her

...that Mary's watching and waiting was transformed into the action of reaching out to her cousin. May we too, as we watch and wait this Advent hear the cry of the poor and transform our watching and waiting into prayerful action of reaching out

Narelle Mullins

Adapted from the Advent homily 14/15 December 2019

No Words

There are no words
to hang
upon the trees
to hide
their nakedness,
or to paint fresh spin
on our deafness
and duality.

I have fallen into silence
unable to shape
the words
that need to be said
to be read
as we bury
the one billion beings
now dead.

No words
can shield the shame,
hold the pain
of this loss,
humble silence
receives the cries
of smothered dreams
disrupted lives.

A cyclone
of change
is forming,
not quiet or still,
it will swirl at will,
its fury will build,
its piercing shrill
will be heard

then new words
will break through
releasing
the truth.

Awakening



A spiritual awakening is a newfound awareness, a new insight, a new wisdom.¹ The experts say that awakenings are not always a major, catastrophic events, but can be small and frequent. The Christian faith is a constant awakening and reawakening to the presence of the sacred which can occur as we reflect upon our Christmas story.

In the early Church and in the first Gospel written there is no record of the birth of Jesus. These stories occur in the second and third Gospels, Matthew and Luke, written a generation or three after Jesus lived. And neither of them tells our story exactly.

Matthew's story begins with a pregnant, but not married, Mary. According to the culture, Joseph should have sent her back to her family in disgrace; but he married her instead. Matthew's story then gives an account of the Wise Men, but does not mention shepherds, angels or animals. They come much later in Luke's Gospel. It is generally accepted that St Francis of Assisi moved the setting from a cave to a wooden stable, some ten centuries later.

And so emerged our story of the birth of Jesus, a sacred and miraculous, virgin birth, in a wooden stable, surrounded by

angels, stars, singing, shepherds, gifts and wise men. In all religions, the birth story of the founder involves something special to flag the importance of the life that follows.

The life of Jesus has had a huge impact on the world. Over the last 2000 years, millions of people have been touched by his life and responded in music, art, literature and compassionate action. Jesus has come to be the human face of the sacred.²

In terms of awakening, it is also worth considering the genealogy of Jesus that precedes Matthew's birth story. John Shelby Spong describes it as the most boring chapter in the New Testament.³

Luke also precedes his nativity story with a genealogy of Jesus; but the two are different. Some ancestors occur in both gospels and some occur in only one or the other.

The scholars agree that both lists were created by the authors and were not to be taken literally.⁴

Matthew's Gospel, written for a Christian community emerging from the Jewish tradition, traces Jesus' ancestry back to

Matthew	Luke
	<u>God, Adam, Seth, Enos, Cainan, Maleleel, Jared, Enoch, Mathusala, Lamech, Noah, Shem, Arphaxad, Cainan, Sala, Heber, Phalec, Ragau, Saruch, Nachor, Thara,</u>
<u>Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah, Perez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David,</u>	<u>Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Juda, Phares, Esrom, Aram, Aminadab, Naasson, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David,</u>
<u>Solomon, Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jeconiah,</u>	
-	<u>Nathan, Mattatha, Menan, Melea, Eliakim, Jonam, Joseph, Judah, Simeon, Levi, Matthat, Jorim, Eliezer, Jose, Er, Elmodam, Cosam, Addi, Melchi, Neri,</u>
<u>Shealtiel, Zerubbabel,</u>	<u>Salathiel, Zorobabel,</u>
<u>Abiud, Eliakim, Azor, Zadok, Achim, Eliud, Eleazar, Matthan, Jacob,</u>	
-	<u>Rhesa, Joannan, Juda, Joseph, Semei, Mattathias, Maath, Nagge, Esli, Naum, Amos, Mattathias, Joseph, Jannai, Melchi, Levi, Matthat, Heli,</u>
<u>Joseph, Jesus</u>	<u>Joseph, Jesus</u>

Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation, to give Jesus authentic Jewish authority. Luke's gospel was written for a Christian community emerging from a gentile tradition, so it traces Jesus back to Adam, the very first human, to stress that Jesus' teaching was for all people.⁵

In traditional Church Art, the genealogy begins with Jesse, the father of King David and is represented by the Jesse Tree. The various branches represent the ancestors of Jesus. It's possible that the connection to King David is emphasised to represent the authority of Jesus.

Another interesting thing in Matthew's genealogy is the unusual inclusion of five women. They all feature in the Old Testament and engage, along with male partners, in adultery or find themselves unmarried and pregnant. Spong suggests that Matthew deliberately included them to indicate that the lineage that produced Jesus flowed through incest, prostitution, seduction, adultery and murder.³

According to religious law, they all should have all been shunned and sent away in disgrace; but none of them were. Spong suggests that Matthew is saying that no amount of immorality and evil can thwart the goodness of God.³

For Christians, Jesus is the human face of God, the human face of goodness. Yet he was born into a tradition that was far from perfect. In the five shame-and-scandal stories the harsh judgements and condemnation that were required were replaced by love and compassion. The adulterers created legitimate families; the disgraced women were dignified. Matthew's genealogy teaches that the love seen in the human face of Jesus can transform any life and bring the sacred to any human distortion.

The point of this Gospel was to awaken the Jewish Christian readers to a new way of living based on love and compassion, not judgement and condemnation. We, too, are invited to be co-creators of a world where goodness, love and compassion prevail.

Some may have seen the recent Queensland Theatre production of *Antigone* in which an enemy soldier's body is denied burial and, indeed, displayed for all of Thebes to see. When the soldier's sister steals his body and buries it, the Leader of Thebes is required to put her to death, not because she has killed anyone, nor even hurt anyone, but because she has broken the law. The girl is the niece of the Leader of Thebes and is engaged to the Leader's son. The Leader agonizes over conflicting responses. One is to enforce the law, to bring security and unity to Thebes. The other is to show compassion and spare the girl, because her actions did no harm and gave her dead brother dignity. The Leader was afraid to let go of the safety of the rules and afraid to challenge established traditions and bad laws.

The Christmas story challenges us in a similar way. In Advent we are invited to prepare ourselves, not for the birth of a baby, but for the challenge of giving birth to the Christ of love and compassion for yet another year.⁶

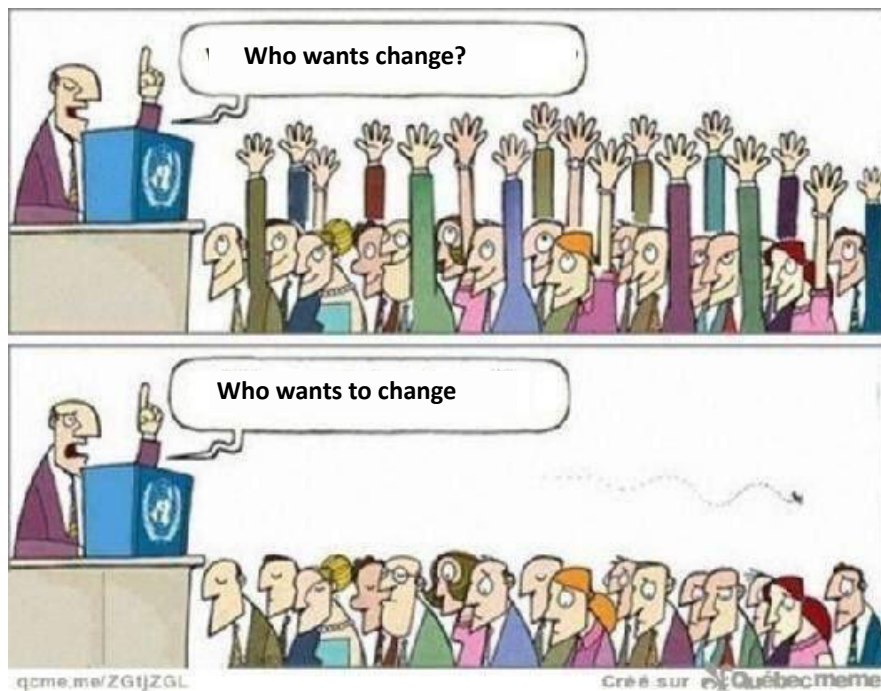
Adapted from the Advent homily 21/22 December 2019

Liz Little

Footnotes:

1. <https://sobernation.com/what-does-it-mean-to-have-a-spiritual-awakening/https://gregoryjenks.com/2018/12/24/emmanuel/https://pastordawn.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/matthew-1-spong.pdf>, Rough Transcript of Bishop Spong's Sermon, Renaissance Unity in 2008
2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genealogy_of_Jesus)
3. <https://www.learnreligions.com/genealogy-of-jesus-700161>
4. <https://pastordawn.com/2017/11/>
5. <https://www.learnreligions.com/genealogy-of-jesus-700161>
6. <https://pastordawn.com/2017/11/>

Change



I know that I put up my hand for many changes to be made – effectively addressing climate change, indigenous recognition, humane policies towards refugees, effective NDIS, the list goes on.

But at this time of my life, I am fairly resistant to change. I'm not rushing into it.

In my experience, and I'm sure yours there are times when life forces change on us -

As Donna Faulds says in the poem 'Allow'
*when loss rips off the doors of your heart
or sadness veils your visions with despair-
the only safety is letting it all in -
allow and grace will carry you to higher ground.*

Challenges in life can change us. But in the stable, comfortable times of our lives, change is not something we readily welcome.

Yet it is the message of the Gospel. Scripture scholars agree that the key message of the Gospel is metanoia. It has often been translated inaccurately. The problem being there is no single word in English that captures the fullness of the Greek word, *metanoia*.

It is much more than repent, as important as that is. Metanoia is calling for a positive, proactive, life-changing response. A more accurate translation would be "change your thought processes and go beyond your mind's present state of limitations". So it is "a complete change of mind" which brings about a "reorientation" of our lives. A "change of direction".

One wonders how the teachings of Jesus to accept ongoing change as a central program of our lives ended up becoming blind obedience to religious institutions!

In the Gospel, John the Baptist calls us away from our stone-heartedness to dramatic personal change and to be instrumental in creating structural change. His is not a call to belief or trust. He demands justice in our daily living.

Jesus' response to the tax collectors and soldiers moves beyond sharing, as important as that is, to addressing behaviours, structures, policies that cause poverty and the inequitable distribution of resources.

It's very clear the widening gap between the rich and the poor; the disconnect between politics and those who are struggling is a world wide phenomenon. It demonstrates a failure of the political and social structures.

The Gospel imperative to love, to be identified with the suffering of those on the edge, is unmistakably clear. Jesus' message is all about challenging the status quo, inclusion, compassion, empowerment for all people to live life to the fullest.

Over the centuries, this message has been distorted, even lost. Dualistic thinking – them and us – has dominated the political and social discourse and continues to keep our country, and much of the world, stuck in a paradigm which entrenches social division and prevents us from being more enlightened, compassionate and hopeful people.

Even though we are aware of the consequences of dualistic thinking, it difficult to free ourselves from it. So the question I ask myself is:

Am I trapped, consciously or unconsciously in habitual allegiances, ways of thinking and set points of view?

Is this, the change of mind, the change of direction required in our time?

Theologian, Ilia Delio explains that the true call of the gospel is to develop a more spacious mind – that seeks out and listens deeply to the needs and views of others; to the earth and all species; sees the Self as part of the whole; engages in life from a place of interdependence and compassion; seeks a greater unity embracing diversity. She says *‘the mind or consciousness that permeates nature is the same flow of activity that each of us inherits in a unique way. In and through our minds we are part of an undivided whole that is our home, the cosmos. We are interrelated beings; always interacting with others; not static but dynamic; we are either part of the dynamic whole or we divide the whole’*.

This highlights the importance of the mind. It’s interesting that the mind gets a pretty bad wrap. We value the heart as the location of transformation; some of us spend a great deal of time working out and caring for our body but how often do we gather to develop our minds?

So much of our mental chatter is automatic; not exactly chosen, but a replay of patterns, opinions we’ve developed over time; an ongoing tendency to have positions about what is happening and what we believe should be happening.

So how do we go beyond the limitations of the mind? How do we rise above our sense of separateness? Open ourselves up to more nondualistic experiences of life?

1. A quiet mind is one key to transforming old opinions and knee-jerk reactions into fresh insights and revelation.

Contemplation allows us to see things in their wholeness instead of parts; a mental discipline that detaches us, even neurologically, from our addiction to our habitual way of thinking from our left brain, which likes to think control.

2. Honest self reflection can assist us to identify our habitual thinking, our fears, our blind spots.

3. Continuously widening our lens is crucial. Listening respectfully to others, who have different perspectives to us, is necessary to expand our world view. Reading and considering diverse political, religious and social views is crucial for gaining a fuller understanding of all aspects of situations. Understanding other people’s concerns is necessary to bring about change.

4. Sometimes we need to re-educate ourselves. On understanding poverty, Professor Frank Stilwell from Sydney University says, “Frankly, if you haven’t lived in a state of extreme poverty yourself, you’re unlikely to understand the

vicious circle characteristics that actually prevent people escaping from that trap in practice”. It’s much more complex than “If you have a go, you’ll get a go”.

5. Deliberately going out of our way to understand the perspective of others is crucial for our mind-change.

6. The Gospel strongly reminds us that it is not enough to become enlightened. We are called to bear witness; to step up beside those suffering; to challenge structures and bring about change. Doing nothing supports the status quo.

There are many ways to change structures.

Barack Obama, speaking at the Obama Foundation in Chicago said that it is not enough to be judgemental about other people, call others out on social media. That is not activism! That is not bringing about change!

Each of us is called by the Gospel to find our unique way of stepping outside the limitations of our thoughts, of working towards a life of ongoing transformation that brings us into fullness of life with all of life.

Transformation is difficult.

It requires conviction, commitment, self-reflection, listening, learning, seeing things from all perspectives, coming out of our comfortable box, taking action!

Transformation, “changing the limitations of our mind”, leaves the end open.

Is this just an interesting concept? Or does it demand non-dualistic thinking? A totally different view of all living beings and our way of living? A change of mind? A change of direction?

Each of us will make our own response to the Gospel call for ongoing change. My challenge is, not wasting the invitations that life offers, to be transformed.

I’ll leave you to reflect on your challenge.

Margaret Clifford

Adapted from the Advent homily 7/8 December 2019

At My Door

The wolf comes knocking at my door
Appealing eyes gain him admission
He wears a coat of many colours
With green he shows me fields more verdant than mine
Red to incite my self- righteous anger
Blue highlights the low points of my life
Gold urges me to feather my nest
A darker shade of green fuels my selfish ambitions
In the black I see my fears which slam the door on love
The brown heralds the autumn of my life
An eagle alights on a nearby branch
I behold its wisdom and quiet majesty
My heart beats faster, my spirits rise
The wolf withdraws
Inside I steel myself for his return.

Peter Moss

(Written as a personal response after a Cluster discussion of Matt. 10:16

*"I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves;
So be as wise as serpents and innocent as doves."*



Paradoxical Commandments

People are illogical, unreasonable and self-centred.

Love them anyway.

If you do good, people will accuse you of selfish ulterior motives.

Do good anyway.

If you are successful, you will win false friends and true enemies.

Succeed anyway.

The good you do today will be forgotten tomorrow.

Do good anyway.

Honesty and frankness make you vulnerable.

Be honest and frank anyway.

The biggest men and women with the biggest ideas can be shot down by
the smallest men and women with the smallest minds.

Think big anyway.

People favour underdogs but follow only top dogs.

Fight for a few underdogs anyway.

What you spend years building may be destroyed overnight.

Build anyway.

People really need help but may attack you if you do help them.

Help people anyway.

Give the world the best you have and you'll get kicked in the teeth.

Give the world the best you have anyway.

Dr Kent M Keith (submitted by M. Lawson)

The Inner World

Listening to the reading from Hugh Mackay's book 'Australia Revisited' a few weeks ago I heard this statement, 'what we need most is not material wealth, ...but other people.' I said to myself, Hey! Wait a minute. While that is certainly true, there is something else of importance, beyond wealth, success, beyond getting and spending – and that is access to what I have termed *The Inner World*.

What and where is this inner world? In a sense it can never be accurately named, because it is unnameable, because it is beyond, above, remote from the outer world. Meister Eckhart (13th C) describes it as NO -thing, that which cannot be described. What we can say is, it is not the world of everyday things – things to be done, planned, organised, our work, our families to care for, essential as these things are. The Buddhist mantra describes this world as *Gate, Para Gate, Para Sam Gate-bodhi svaha*, that is, going beyond, and going beyond that, and going even beyond that, to enlightenment. Teilhard de Chardin, the French Jesuit, philosopher and missionary, says, *Let us leave the surface, and without leaving the world, plunge into God*. Jesus tells us, the kingdom of God is within you. What we can unequivocally assert is that this world is indescribably magnificent – St John on the Island of Patmos - *I was taken up into the seventh heaven*. Sadly, most of the people around us have not heard of this inner world, let alone have accessed it.

So how do we get there, how to access the riches of this inner world? There are many paths, of which I will mention a few. The path trod by countless people throughout the ages is the 'Way of Meditation'. Meditation enables us to withdraw from the outer world and venture on the road to the inner. And there are many methods of meditation practice, of which we have to choose the one which best suits us. I came across Vipassana Meditation practice, seemingly quite by accident, 30 years ago, and I knew at once, having already tried other methods, that this was right path for me. To me it is the simplest and the most direct path – not necessarily the easiest. Here we observe the breath, then focus on the sensations of the body, first gross sensations, such as pain, then the subtle sensations. The World Christian Meditation Community provides meditation courses, retreats and sessions worldwide. Transcendental Meditation, using a mantra, has benefited many. And there are other approaches to meditation.

For all meditation, the essential thing is to come into silence, and stillness, and to maintain one's attentiveness, without strain, but with persistence, and to persevere, regularly. Now and again won't get us anywhere.

Vipassana meditation recommends two hours daily-that's a lot in a busy life; WCMC recommends two 20 minute sessions per day. In her later years my mother meditated three times



daily, 20 minutes per session. The Dalai Lama meditates daily 3am-8 am. So, take your pick, do what suits you, and keep at it.

We withdraw from the Outer world. Deserts and mountains have traditionally been sought by meditators. We have to create our own desert, in our own home.

Another avenue towards The Inner World is communion with nature, being still in Her presence, absorbing her Spirit as She leads us within. St John of the Cross in his poem, *The Inner Flame of Love*:

*My Beloved is the mountains, they reveal him unto me
And the lonely wooded valleys, and the islands of the sea
Strange and lovely, and the murmur
Of the waters as they flow
And the sweet entrancing whisper
Of the winds that softly blow*

Our indigenous brothers and sisters for thousands of years have experienced the spiritual power of nature. They term it Dadirri, listening to the Land, experiencing inner, quiet, still awareness of and connection to the land.

The Buddhist poet Tzumi Shikuku wrote a poem,

*No Part Left Out
Watching the moon at midnight
Alone in the middle of the sky
I saw myself completely
I saw myself completely
Whole
No part left out*

To see myself completely, not as I think I am, not as I would like to be, but as I truly am.

There are other pathways to the Inner World, eg dance, music, poetry, walking, dreams, fantasies.

Whatever our path, we have to work at it. Goenka, the teacher of Vipassana meditation, reiterates effort, constant effort; this

The Inner World (Continued)

for ten days, 8-10 hours meditation per day. Carl Jung used to encourage his students, You have to do the inner work. And nobody can do this work for us. We have to embrace a path and stick to it.

It is work, but, as many have testified, it can get easier... St Teresa of Avila tells us in her Autobiography that she meditated faithfully for 20 years without experiencing any satisfaction in prayer. Only after that time did she experience inner, ecstatic joy.

But what is the real point of all this Meditation, or whatever inner journey we are following?

We are not seeking the inner world in the expectation of pleasant experiences. If we want that, a bottle of wine could do the trick, and more quickly and easily.

What we are seeking, and what we will find, if we persevere, is the Truth, to know ourselves as we truly are. It is called 'insight'. T S Eliot, in his poem *Little Gidding*,

And the end of all our exploring

Will be to arrive where we started

And know the place for the first time

Ah! Now I see how badly I have treated that person. Instead, I need to help that person. I've never before noticed all those homeless people hanging around.

Robert Frost, in his poem *The Road Less Travelled*

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood

And I, I took the one less travelled by

And that has made all the difference

That is what meditation does. It makes a difference. Outwardly life will be the same, but inwardly all is changed, we see with new eyes.

A man recently attended a meditation retreat led by Sadguru. At the end of the week, returning to his home, he noticed dirty dishes on the sink. He said to himself, I'd better wash these dishes, which he did. He had never before noticed the dirty dishes, let alone washed them. His family were utterly astounded.

We bring that insight, that wisdom, from the inner world up to the outer world, from the unconscious mind up to the conscious mind. Now I know what I have to do, now I have the energy to do it. St Paul, in a blinding vision, was swept off his horse. Then a voice said, 'Go into the city. You will be told what to do.' He was told what he must do, he spent the rest of his life travelling to the Christian communities, preaching, encouraging them, writing them letters. Jesus,

transfigured on Mount Tabor, came down from the mountain. Come let us go, he said to the disciples.

The Buddha sat under the bodhi tree. I will not move from here, he said, until I reach this inner place. Next morning his whole being was illumined with wisdom. What did he do then? He did not sit there basking in ecstasy. Filled with compassion, he spent the rest of his life ministering to others. Meditation gives us the energy and determination to do what life asks of us. And many other benefits flow from meditation.



How fortunate we are here in this community that at least we have heard of this inner world, and we have encouragement to enter it – both for our own benefit and that of our world.

Joan Mooney

Reasons to Hope

Some months ago, I was sitting with my gorgeous Mum in New Farm Park on a beautiful Spring day (yes, spring in early August... but that's the magic of Brisbane for you).

We noticed a group of about ten teenagers and twenty-somethings a few metres away, all looking pretty bright and happy about life, and obviously getting themselves organised for something. A little later, two of the young ladies from this group approached us, and with big smiles, asked if we knew about the concept of 'Paying It Forward'. When we said that we did, they handed over a paper bag with 'You're Awesome' written on it, and explained that there were some chocolates inside the bag for us. "All we ask", they said, "is that you perhaps might pay this forward in some small way over the next few days."



Now... my first thought as they had approached me was, "Yeah sure. Here we go with another religious spiel." Yet, as they left, all I could think of was: They're our future. And if they're any indication, it's lookin' good.

To me, God (as referred to by Terry as the 'loving presence') is in the small everyday things that we do, as demonstrated by these young people in New Farm Park.

It's time that we stopped judging the state of the world through Hollywood's movies and Donald Trump's twitter feed. They do not actually represent what predominantly happens on the planet every day. The world's future is created by the billions of 'loving presence' actions that we each take every day.

In the past few years, I have occasionally offered an SMX homily on my favourite theme, which is that the world's not all bad. And on the contrary, there is so much that is astonishing about it. Have you looked at a rainbow lately? And I mean, really looked at it. Or, perhaps you witnessed a small act of kindness offered to someone in need? I believe that the world is a beautiful mess, full of intractable issues, and yet suffused with the astonishing human capacity to create that loving presence. That capacity means that we are collectively

wealthier, healthier and safer than at any previous time in human history. And I have the indisputable data to substantiate this.

I suspect that, on occasions, some people may misunderstand this, and think of me as some sort of deluded Pollyanna who thinks that the world is perfect. No, I don't think that. How could it be? Humanity presently faces perhaps the greatest long-term existential threat to its survival in the form of climate change. Here's another issue. As of 2018, 70 million people were in a situation where they have been forcibly displaced in some form. The majority of those are in their own country, although 26 million had to flee to other countries as refugees. And here's another reality. Even though the figure has improved dramatically in the past 20 years, approximately 10% of the world's population is still chronically undernourished.

And yet, here's what else is occurring. Millions of good people are working tirelessly on improving life on earth. Over 400 million acts of volunteering are performed every day around the world. And when it comes to climate change – even though it may take a 1000 years to fully redress the present dilemmas – there are endless projects that are doing something about it. Now, these ongoing projects are critical, for a number of reasons. One is that they can effect positive change. And another is that they give us Hope. Without that Hope, we will indeed be lost. Without Hope, people give up. Yet when we still hold on to Hope, it gives us the spirit and energy to keep doing what is needed.

Here are five brief examples of actions that will have a significant positive impact on Climate Change, and about the world in general.

- I was in Copenhagen late last year, and marvelled at their obsession with Zero Carbon. There are more bicycles than people in this beautiful city. 60% of the population ride at least once a day. There are even special traffic lights solely for bikes. It shows that cities are the key to minimising on climate change.
- Carbon credits have too often become a political football, and yet, they have significant possible consequences.
- The Great Ocean Cleanup

Artificial meat will be commonplace within 10 years. It will be more nutritious, tastier, and cheaper than present meat. It is developed with stem cells that are taken from cows and then grown in large labs. Present meat production takes up 28% of all land mass use on the planet, so this will eventually have a massive positive impact upon land use.

The Sustainable Development Goals (sometimes called the Global Goals) were negotiated by 192 signatory countries in 2015, and the clear outcome is to attain those 17 goals by



Volunteers cleaning up a beach

2030. There is every likelihood that we will, given that the 15 Millennium Goals set in the year 2000 were achieved by 2015. The Global Goals are increasingly being adopted worldwide by education systems, and other organisations such as the Global Scouts Movement.

Now... will these and many other projects minimise the effects of global change? Maybe. Maybe not. But what choice do we have, other than to just do nothing, and wait until it's all too late? What sort of humanistic response is that? We have to do something... and we are.

Now, those projects I mentioned are global actions, and will require the collective efforts of millions of people. Just as important, though, is what we each do every day. So, as I'm drawing this to a close, here are three actions that we might consider.

1. With the SMX prayers that we offer, please be careful of outright scaring us with the plight of others on the planet. It generally doesn't work. It robs us of hope, and just creates despair. Instead, explain the situation logically, and then offer us a possible action we can take. For example, give us Peter Dutton's postal address, and remind us that politicians subscribe to a 100:1 belief. That is, for every letter they receive, they calculate that another 100 people share a similar belief. Regardless, I love hearing about the productive actions that many of you are taking in your own small way. That's what gives us hope.

2. Become aware of your own 'negativity bias', especially when you are talking with others. The 'negativity bias' is when you overbalance towards what is wrong with something, rather than what is good. It's easy to detect in others. Just listen to them. A minority of people just want to complain, and they even delight in dragging everyone else down with them. Misery loves company. Instead, learn how to respectfully redirect the conversation into positive action, rather than into paralysing inaction. Put a Jiminy Cricket on your shoulder, and get it to chirp you when you realise you are sliding down the negativity path in those conversations. We need to use Velcro

for our positive thoughts, and Teflon for our negative thoughts. 'Negativity bias' is the other way around.

3. Join a Community Alliance of some form. There are countless action groups who lobby for change. You have plenty of choice. And it doesn't always need to be a long-term commitment. Sometimes, it may even be for a single event. Like those teenagers in New Farm Park. Did they change the planet that day? At least they made the effort.... Thank you.

You are not a drop in the ocean. You are the entire ocean in a drop. Rumi

Australia witnessed an 80% reduction in single-use plastic bag consumption over the course of just four short months this year.

A ten year old girl called Molly convinced Cairns City Council last year to ban all single use plastic straws in the city. Her initiative is now spreading across Australia. Starbucks has also banned all plastic straws worldwide.

And especially: A glow-in-the-dark toilet seat so that the light doesn't need to be turned on during the night. Is there no end to human ingenuity?

Use cold water in your washing machine. 90% of the energy used for the wash is needed to heat the water.

Tony Ryan

Gratitude

*We are grateful
that we have a community of
people
who are willing
to care for each other.
Let us remember
that we all need each other.*

Ted

Exile in Kyogle



This was a really beautiful place to have our retreat. About twenty or so of us enjoyed the weekend away in October. And thanks to Merlin, Pam and Michael it was really well organised. Thai Chi, bush walks, eating and drinking and loads of conversation. We had an informal Eucharist on Sunday and plenty of time to chill out and enjoy each other's company.



Resilience

Resilience can be defined as the ability to cope with stress and adversity and bounce back to a previous state of normal functioning. Resilience is a process and not an individual trait that some have and others don't.

Most of us have had very stressful periods in our life and in looking back, we typically have an uncanny ability to bounce back.

My ability to cope with stress and anxiety has been bolstered by my attendance at St Mary's. From the many homilies we've heard, some inspiring, some educational, some controversial and some with Peter Kennedy's thoughtful intellect, one can realise that attendance at St Mary's has built up some resilience by bolstering our knowledge and self-awareness.

In 2019 we heard a number of people talk about the real catastrophe of climate change. We've learnt about the stress and anxiety that climate change is causing for some, particularly school children.

I believe it is time to focus on bouncing back. If we dwell only on the fact that stress and anxiety are connected to climate change, then things will probably get worse rather than better!

Perhaps it's time to be more resilient.

Few people now doubt that global warming from human caused greenhouse gases is a major contributor to our changing climate. The IPCC reports that delayed actions will reduce our options in the future. Opportunities exist now, and these are generally described as 'the adaption and mitigation towards sustainable development'.

Our "business as usual" approach perhaps is part of the problem, albeit it seems totally unrealistic that we drop everything to build mud brick homes or grow our own food.

In the past when we experience difficulties we've been encouraged to find support from family and our Church. Church has been the place for spiritual growth and where we can find comfort from a caring God. The Gospel stories provide us with examples where individuals and communities were faced with injustice and disaster. Building a faith in God and a belief in the coming of the Lord formed the basis of countless messages of hope.

In the book of Psalms we read: " My help comes from the Lord. The Lord will keep you from all evil, he will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and coming from this time forth and for evermore".

As part of my journey at SMX I've come to understand that 'The Lord' or 'God' is best thought of as being my true essence or my spirit.

Life has taught me that my faith in this God is only realised when I take action. Understanding or hoping (sometimes with blind faith) that someone else will always bail us out when in trouble, can lead to great disappointment.

James, in a letter to the church, says: "Consider it pure joy when you are involved in various trials, as the testing of your faith produces endurance. Endurance must take full effect which then makes you mature and complete".

Taking action to eliminate stress and anxiety in our life is important to lead a meaningful and fulfilling life.

We need resilience and endurance for our future.

A colleague at my workplace recently shared an article which I found useful in addressing some anxiety in this world potentially doomed by political instability, impending climate crisis doom and gross injustice.

The article is premised on this fact - we are all going to die! The issue is we don't know how or when we will die. As death is inevitable, the question becomes...

What do you do between now and the day you die?.

Well, that depends how long do I have ?

The article then spoke about surveys of people who had been diagnosed with an illness which would result in them having very short periods of life left. Many expressed how important it was to do certain things in the life they had left. These things included:

- Forgive yourself and seek healing
- Pursue family harmony
- Tell people what you want them to know
- Follow your gut feeling
- Be a great friend

Change

Another thing we know in life is everything changes and keeps changing.

We can let stress and anxiety become our response to change in our life or we can build resilience and take actions that will be meaningful. Big or small, our hope and faith can then step in. To be resilient we need to plan, understand and work with others to deal with the issues we have now, and those which will impact us. Our faith can steer us to action.

We can take action and work towards change in various areas.

Social justice is one of the actions that this Community has identified as a worthwhile contribution to living today. We can include supporting Micah Projects.



Micah Christmas hampers packed and ready to go. Many SMX people help with the hampers - contributing goods and money, packing and delivering.

Environmental justice is the challenge that climate change is imposing on us now!

Our journey forward almost certainly requires our community to build resilience: to adapt to a changing world by changing our habits and building our faith in our future.

I'm hopeful that our continuing journey here at SMX will provide us with resilience to forge a great future for ourselves and our future generations.

So next time you feel anxious or stressed, ask yourself, 'What is the next action I can take?'
Mark Thompson

Silence

Let silence be placed around us
like a mantle.

Let us enter into it,
as through a small secret door;
stooping,
to emerge into an acre of peace,
where stillness reigns
and God is ever present.

*From a poem by Kate McIlhagga
submitted by Margaret Lawson*

Some Observations of the Church in Rome

In June this year we had the good fortune to enjoy a five day stay in Rome. Where to start in this Eternal City abounding in magnificent piazzas, churches, gardens and architectural delights? And as for the Catholic Church itself, I was curious to see what changes might be apparent in this great establishment.

Over the past years, there have been many heartening happenings brought about by Pope Francis. He has acted strongly on many issues and promised action on others, though long delays sometimes have been leaving hope dangling in the air. But there has been so much turmoil within the Church, such collapse of authority and weakening of principles during the jurisdiction of at least two of Francis' predecessors. The disillusionment of huge numbers of Catholics has been brought about largely by the sexual abuse scandals world-wide and lack of proper and just action by those very men who are expected to lead and guide. The shepherd's crook has so often driven away the faithful flock instead of drawing in and protecting.

On Pentecost Sunday we went to St. Peter's, like thousands of others, ready to join the expected queues going inside the great Basilica. Not that Sunday! The Pope was on the steps outside the entrance doors, presiding at High Mass, so that was the end of any visit until well after the ceremony's end. Even being able to enter the huge open space took some doing; the whole of the pillared square was cordoned off by wooden barriers and the only entrances were through security gates at which were guards, some with rifles and guns, checking bags and backpacks. "Contro terrorista" someone explained.

The day was hot, the sun blazing down on everyone ranked on either side of the pontiff. He at least was under an awning at the altar but on his right and in the full sun were many dozens of bishops and archbishops, all of them in full regalia: long alb, red Pentecostal chasuble and pectoral cross; hopefully they were also smothered in sunblock because it was a High Mass and would have gone on for a very long time. Why hadn't they all dressed down and been sensible, throwing off the heavy clothes and donning sunhats and sandals? I suspected it was to show their rank and power. I suspected many things about the Church during that short time in the city.



En route to St. Peter's where the pane e vino were about to undergo transformation, transubstantiation by Pope Francis.

We found some shade and perched at the base of one of the big pillars. During the Pope's homily we read through the Mass booklet. A notice on the back page startled us; it read, in Italian and English,

Plenary Indulgence. The faithful who take part in this liturgical celebration in St. Peter's Square can obtain a Plenary Indulgence under the usual conditions: freedom from all attachment to sin, including venial sin. That counted me out for starters. The next requirement was also a no-no for my chance of gaining this great Indulgence: sacramental confession. Many moons ago I stopped that practice.

It was very disappointing to see this notice of the Plenary Indulgence printed in the Mass book and under the Pope's watch. How long since we'd participated in that strange gift of expiation of all our transgressions? Gone the way of so many other strange rules and promises. It immediately springs to the suspicious mind the question of all those hundreds of clergy who abuse children and adults and still continue in their priestly roles. Who is to know whether they go to confession, the Seal of the Confessional being totally secured under Church rules, not to be broken and above the law of the land. Whether or not these crimes are confessed before the confessor, they have been forgiven by the Church or pushed under the stained carpet.

Around the city, especially in the Vatican area, priests and nuns still wear full clerical outfits, the young seminarians in the long black cassock and white collar, nuns of different orders wearing the habit, longish veils and rosary beads hanging from the cords around their waists. They looked happy enough, a couple of them chewing gum as they waited at the traffic lights.

We wandered in delight around every piazza in Rome and went into many churches to marvel at the sheer size, the architecture, paintings, the statuary. The bigger churches have a heady number of little chapels and altars along the sides and in the apses. Roofs soar and sharpen the sounds below. During a Mass in one great church, the priest used the acoustics to good effect to highlight a point – many points, in fact - of his sermon. Each time he boomed out a sentence, he had to wait for the echo to die away before continuing. Not much chance of nodding off there!



Among the furniture and furnishings in the churches are the confessionals; most of those we came across were small wooden structures with just enough room for the confessor to sit in the middle compartment, those confessing kneeling on a prie-dieu either side.

Candle lighting seems to be out in many Roman churches. In place of the gently waving flame of the little votive candle sending prayers to heaven, is now the light bulb 'candle'; put your Euro or 50c piece in the slot and a tiny light comes on. I suppose that's one instance of churches moving with the times, though a bit hard to get used to.

I am probably arch-critical of the Church and think negatively about its rule after so much horror and deceit has been revealed - and in a never-ending flood. And I felt that the Pope's directive to the hierarchy to become more in tune with the people has not achieved as much as he'd hoped – their authority and their decision-making is still happening. When you're on a pedestal, 'ontologically changed' as Pope John Paul II declared, it's hard, very hard to let go.

It was such a privilege to be able to spend those days in Rome. I loved our walking and wandering through the piazzas, the churches and museums, enjoying the people and the food. But it was surprising to come across these old Catholic ways still alive in this world of change. There are such strong and ongoing attempts by lay groups to move the Church back to the good actions of the Second Vatican Council which gave such hope for renewal, refreshment and much more participation of the people.

Pope Francis spoke about people like me (and tens of thousands of other Catholics) with this admonition:

A mother defends herself with a heart filled with love before doing so with words. I wonder whether there is any love for the church in the hearts of those who pay so much attention to the scandals. Pope Francis

Read more at https://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/pope_francis_507790

As a member of the Catholic Church, I believe that those who pay attention to the scandals, multitudinous and appalling as they are, can still love the church in all the profoundly good ways in which it follows Christ's teachings.

*Jan Coleman.
August 2019*

Coochiemudlo Retreat





Coochiemudlo

Thanks to Heather and David for discovering this great venue for our camp. And once again so well organised by Merlin and Michael. We had a lovely couple of days and we keep realising that making new connections in our community is both fun and refreshing. Jeff helps keep us nimble with the Thai Chi and our spirits are fed with conversation, singing and dancing and delicious meals. Thanks everyone who came and contributed.

Coochie Waters

Kayaka kayaka to where do you paddle?

Past death's sharp grasp
Of trees in the shallow

Above the sea eagle glides majestic and silent

Waves slapping rocks with sea breezes vibrant

Now sings my heart out of tune and with sadness

Thinking of mother with time passing and gladness

Michael Tansky



Injustice That Does Not Let Me Go

I am a retired immigration officer and a human rights activist. For the last five years I have been a volunteer at the Indooroopilly Uniting Church Asylum Seeker and Refugee Support Group. We help those who came by sea on perilous journeys and who have been persecuted by our successive governments.

There are more than 300 government-rejected asylum seekers in Brisbane, now destitute, cut off from all federal allowances. They are distinctly different from others I have known. Their visas are temporary, they rely on costly public transport and have limited English because they are ineligible for the Adult Migrant English Program.

From many Australians there has been no welcome for those who come by sea seeking our protection. Our parliamentarians and many voters have forgotten that they themselves and their forebears were aliens here. The Uluru Statement from the Heart says it so eloquently: *There is something wrong in the state of Australia that we imprison and torment the strangers who seek our protection.*

But there are those working to address this.

Last year the Queensland Government legislated a Human Rights Act, a legal framework in which to lodge complaints against human rights abuses. Hopefully we will see the vigorous community education program needed to educate Queenslanders about their universal human rights.

There is also emergency relief in the form of a Queensland Government grant for 2019-21. It won't be enough and, until the inhumane policies are reformed, the burden of support will continue to fall on generous individuals and charitable groups, who will be challenged to provide even basic help.

Around this city and beyond, there are charity groups providing much needed top-ups to this emergency relief. My group is but one. We see it as a unique opportunity to practise our faith and exercise our humanity and our democracy, while we continue to lobby for unjust laws to be repealed and unfair discrimination to cease!

The Qld government funded Asylum Seeker and Refugee Assistance (ASRA) Program is currently the safety net for over 300 human beings – kids at school, people needing medicines, people who are homeless and who need help finding work, if they have work rights.

It is good to know that the Queensland Minister for Health has directed his department to treat asylum seekers and that Queensland schools enrol the children. Tertiary institutions have been slow to respond, but some scholarships with living allowances are emerging for the very talented. Graduates of



Refugees welcomed and assisted at Indooroopilly Uniting Church

our local universities must lobby their Alma Maters! Talented refugees need to become former refugees, realize their dreams and have a future.

There is also a community ground swell of disgust at the cruelty being imposed on asylum seekers. The protests and fundraising of the Ecumenical Social Justice Group of the Western Suburbs are legendary. The Refugee Action Collective organizes rallies and protests at short notice. Individuals still visit the detention centre in Pinkenba, as well as the people imprisoned under guard in Alternative Places of Detention, in hospitals and those in community detention and without visas. Rebecca Lim recently initiated a small group to welcome new arrivals from offshore detention with sim cards, mobile phone top-ups and clothes.

Redlands4refugees, the Refugee Association of Logan, various Catholic parishes in Logan and others on the northside are active groups who help to inform the wider community. A group in Ballina is hosting asylum seeker men from the Bardon units for a "holiday" – a change of scene so very positive for those who have felt rejection for so long. Every month the Brisbane Refugee and Asylum Seeker Support Network meets to share information and pursue action.

The Indooroopilly Uniting church uses its brilliant location opposite the pub and bus station to spell out, on placards, the dire circumstances of the men on Manus.

At our Thursday and Saturday clinics at Indooroopilly, hundreds of volunteers have helped over 1000 asylum seekers. We got involved with helping with government forms because of the tremendously important English classes that are held at the church. Sadly, as the years pass, the asylum seekers can become drained of confidence and energy to participate in the classes. They become isolated and feel not welcomed.

At our clinics, we are helped by volunteer interpreters and, in recent times, we have been allowed to access telephone interpreting. This is crucial because the legal issues are

becoming increasingly complex and we know that any inconsistencies in claims can lead to refusals.

Knowing the fragility and the traumatic backgrounds of our refugee friends, we strive to be a place of friendship and informality, the opposite of an office, and yet get the bureaucratic forms completed accurately. Law students and retired professionals wheel around in a large room that looks chaotic but isn't. The hospitality provided includes homemade biscuits and cakes. "Australian people good people" they say. It is an all-round uplifting experience, a bright few hours in very fraught lives.

Volunteers go to Food Bank to provide an unpredictable range of fresh and processed food. Donations of money buy the staples: basmati rice, cooking oil and toiletries.

I wish we had more \$50 vouchers and GO CARDS and more money to cover volunteer travel costs from other cities. We really should be paying for the skilled work done to follow up complex cases on which lives depend. I hope we will see success with an application for a grant. We remain a volunteer-run show - a great Aussie tradition.

I am often asked what keeps me going, and why I use up my retirement years to support to asylum seekers and refugees. We hear in the Gospel, *love the alien as yourself; ... just as you did it to one of the least of my family, you did it to me – welcomed me ... cared for me*. I feel compelled to do what I can. The pure evil being done to innocents, the persecution, the cruelty are things never to be ignored, never to be silent about. I was a migrant child who owes her life to the Christian patriots on whose dairy farm my family were given safe haven in 1944 and am now compelled to protect others.

I have never seen more vulnerable, deliberately broken people than these. Their plight offends all my sensibilities and my understanding of Fair Australia, of democracy, of due process and natural justice. This is my beloved country which has lost its way. There is no alternative but to continue to challenge politically all that is wrong and to continue to grow the grass roots movement of people who know it is wrong. We will do this until the men, women and children living among us are free, have recovered their human dignity and have a future. There is room in my Australia for all of them.

(Donations to the Indooroopilly Uniting Church Asylum Seeker and Refugee Support Group can be made to Refugee Support BSB 034 063 Account 510 468)

Freddie Steen



The parable of the Good Samaritan reminds us of what Jesus thought about treating the 'other'.

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Reflections on Japan

Some short poems I wrote on my recent trip.

The Mud Pools at Beppu

Gushing, steaming pools
Fuming primordial mud
Our Earth's heart poured out.

Cherry Blossom Time

Naked limbs burst forth in pink abundance
Petals cling or fall in the soft breeze
The brown earth blushes in its wake.



A Japanese Garden

Sculptured, cultured greenery
Tranquil waters shine
Nature's beauty put in order.

The A Bomb

(Written after a visit to the Atomic Bomb Museum in Nagasaki)

A weapon of war on full throttle
Fuelled by fear and deadly intent
Innocent lives devoured in a mushroom cloud
The sky wept with poisoned tears
O Justice, thou indeed art blind!

Peter Moss

Campfire at Kyogle

