
October /
November 2004
Issue 8

The Next Step

REFORMING
ALLIANCE

Within the Uniting Church in Australia



Canberra Christian Fellowship in the Methodist Tradition

September Service

“God loves you”. That was the message of Rev. Abraham Tang’s sermon on 26 September. Abraham pointed out that all of us NEED love. He then reminded us of Zacchaeus climbing a tree to see Jesus. Zacchaeus was considered by his contemporaries as someone who was worthy of no consideration, yet Jesus made a point of spending time with him. God’s love is available to everyone. God’s love is also a powerful agent of change. In response to Jesus and God’s love He offered, Zacchaeus became a changed man, giving to the poor and repaying more than was required to people he had cheated. Abraham mentioned the tradition that suggests Zacchaeus became an important leader within the early Church.

We are grateful to Abraham for the powerful yet simple message he brought to us.

We completed our service by celebrating the Lord’s Supper together.

ID

Singing the night away in October

Following the great success of our first Basket tea / Hymn Singing meeting in September, a good group gathered to again eat and sing.

As before there were sandwiches and cakes aplenty so noone should have left feeling peckish.

The singing was again joyful and we rediscovered many old favourites that have been helpful to us as we have grown in faith. Many stories were shared of how particular hymns sparked memories of significant points in our Christian lives or reminded us of past events or people we have known.

Joyce told us her special hymn was MHB number 744 "O Happy Day". It was very special to her because during the singing of this hymn she made her decision to follow Christ.

Ken was reminded of his Uncle, who was his first Sunday School teacher and who gave him great encouragement early in his Christian life, when singing no. 516 “Trust and Obey”. Ken remembers his Uncle in the church choir singing the bass part.

Margaret told us how hymn 596 “Make me a captive, Lord, And then I shall be free;” had sparked a response from her to God many years ago.

ID

God doesn't call the qualified, He qualifies the called.

The Reforming Alliance and Us

Before our October hymn singing began, a short discussion was held to consider whether our Fellowship wanted to become a member of The Reforming Alliance. Since we knew some people were unable to attend that evening we had also consulted them prior to our gathering.

The result of our discussion was a decision to join The Reforming Alliance as a fellowship and to send a donation.

Our membership caused some consideration of membership eligibility. The full title of The Reforming Alliance is “*The Reforming Alliance Within The Uniting Church In Australia*” but we, of course, are NOT within the Uniting Church. We have left, although many of us remain as members or retain an interest in The Uniting Church as individuals. The RA executive decided our fellowship met membership requirements.

ID

People are funny, they want the front of the bus, the middle of the road, and the back of the church.

God promises a safe landing, not a calm passage.

Reforming Alliance Meetings

Having invited Mary Hawkes to visit Canberra and preach for us, we wanted to give her the opportunity of meeting and speaking with as many people as was practically possible. Consequently two Reforming Alliance meetings were organised. The first, held at O'Connor Uniting Church on Friday night 22nd October, attracted a reasonable number of people and allowed Mary to share her observations and thoughts on what is happening in the Uniting Church and what the future might hold. The second meeting, held down the coast at Bega Uniting Church on the Saturday afternoon 23rd October, attracted a similar crowd and gave south coast residents an 'at home' chance to hear the latest news.

At both meetings Mary gave a brief summary of happenings in the states and at the Synod meetings that had recently been held.

- In Queensland a number of ministers are quite stressed and finding it hard to cope with the pressures they are facing.
- The N.S.W. Synod (includes the A.C.T.) looked at the issue of theological education. Staff and funding to the United Theological College (UTC) were cut. The possibility of permitting ministry candidates to receive their training through Wesley Institute was raised.
- The Victorian Synod (includes Tasmania) overwhelmingly defeated a number of motions proposing actions that many saw as necessary to comply with the Basis of Union.
- In South Australia a decision was made to abolish the current Presbyteries, replacing them with just a single Synod wide Presbytery and within that Presbytery encouraging Congregations to form into networks with other Congregations that share similar ministries, focuses or other common features.
- One Western Australian Presbytery went to the W.A. Synod and asked to be abolished as it was unable to operate effectively.

Mary encouraged evangelical congregations and members to work with each other in order to support and help each other and so to further God's work. She reminded us that Congregations are the core of the Uniting Church and that the Church organisational structures exist to serve and support the Congregations, not the other way round as often seems to be the case in practice.

A degree of pessimism was expressed by some at the meetings when thinking of the future but Mary countered that pessimism with the timely reminder "**but then there's God!**" ID

Many folks want to serve God, but only as advisers.

October Service

We were very glad to welcome Mrs. Mary Hawkes who travelled from South Australia, with a friend Pam Nelson, to be with us as the preacher for our October service.

Mary is the National Chair of EMU (**E**vangelical **M**embers of the **U**nitng Church in Australia) and vice-chair of The Reforming Alliance, however she was with us to preach from God's Word, not to represent either organisation.

A congregation of around sixty gathered to worship together and afterwards to share in a light meal and fellowship. ID

Some people are kind, polite, and sweet-spirited - until you try to sit in their pews.

A Blessing

Shortly after our October service at which Mary Hawkes preached, someone who had attended telephoned with a 'blessing' for our fellowship. He had found the service very uplifting and the music, particularly Hymn 423 (I've found a Friend; O such a friend! He loved me ere I knew Him; ...), really 'spoke' to him.

He said he believed our Fellowship had a wider importance than we imagined. 'We only see the next step as we walk in the steps of the Master who said to His disciples "Follow me"'. HB

Fellowship and Praise – November Hymn Singing

On the 14th November, the Gospel Chapel was again the venue for our between services gathering.

We began the evening by devouring some tasty pizzas as we enjoyed a time of fellowship together.

After devotions prepared by Joyce, we gathered around the piano and began to sing. The first few hymns requested suggested a nautical theme (634 – “Will your anchor hold in the storms of life,” 157 – “Jesus calls us! O’er the tumult Of our life’s wild restless sea,”) however as on previous occasions we sang a very wide selection of hymns that again triggered memories and had special meaning for us.

Hymn 667 (The day Thou gavest, Lord, is ended,) had importance for several people. Beryl mentioned how she had recently ‘given’ it to a grand-daughter who was going to Tanzania to work for some months.

While singing hymns gives us much enjoyment, the reason they were written was to praise and worship God. With one hymn we sang, we had selected several verses to sing but omitted a verse that was significant to the hymn and completed the message of the hymn. I was very glad that we were not allowed to go to the next request until that verse was sung. God has been speaking with us through the hymns and we have been taking notice.

ID

Campbell Gospel Chapel - Carols at Campbell

The Campbell Gospel Chapel congregation are organising a Christmas event “Carols at Campbell” for SATURDAY 11 December 2004 at 7-00pm. Supper will follow.

They have invited us to be a part of their Christmas celebrations and are also inviting the local community by means of a letterbox drop.

It would be good to support them in this witness to the people of Campbell and it promises to be a most enjoyable evening in any case.

ID

Our Carols evening

On Sunday 19 December at 6-00pm we will hold a Carols service where we can remember God’s gift to us through the singing of Christmas Carols.

We will also be joined by friends with different cultural heritages who will sing for us and tell us a little of the way they celebrate Christmas. Those friends include Koreans, Fijians and Vietnamese.

This should be a wonderful evening. Please join us.

There will be supper afterwards.

ID

What do we believe?

Several people have found the following table, taken from a longer article by Nick Hawkes printed in the Winter 2004 Travelling EMU, useful.

The Uniting Church can’t decide whether to be orthodox or not. ... The result is a faith crisis which has led to there being at least two different religions in the UCA, the characteristics of which can be summarised as follows:

	<u>Liberal revisionism</u>	<u>Orthodox faith</u>
God is	<i>still distant from us or not able to be grasped</i>	<i>with us</i>
The essence of God	<i>remains hidden behind many religious masks</i>	<i>is seen as Jesus</i>
Jesus is primarily	<i>a brave and tolerant moral teacher</i>	<i>God’s Son, who died for our sins.</i>
The cross represents	<i>a moral example</i>	<i>God’s saving act</i>
The resurrection is	<i>not believed</i>	<i>believed</i>
Heaven is	<i>possibly not true</i>	<i>true</i>
Biblical principles are	<i>revisable</i>	<i>not revisable</i>
Intercessory prayer is	<i>not valid</i>	<i>valid</i>

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Mary Hawkes' sermon

Many people were interested in getting copies of Mary's sermon so here it is, with her permission, from her notes.

Psalm 23

In times when things around us look very hopeless we need to know where we can find our hope and protection.

A shepherd in the middle east led his sheep and lived with them. Consequently they knew his voice and followed him in complete trust. The shepherd provided the sheep with:

- food
- water
- protection from the weather, predators and thieves
- someone to find them when they were lost.

v.1 The Lord is my Shepherd I shall not want

If God is my Shepherd there is nothing more I can or will need because He will be all these things to me. The sheep, according to both the Old Testament and the New Testament know the voice of their shepherd and will not follow another. They have absolute trust in him because their needs are always met by him.

v.2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters

God finds good places for me to lie down and rest. The pasture is plentiful and safe. There is plenty of water. Nothing overwhelms me here. When we are resting in the Lord, our Shepherd, even if a great storm is raging [in or around our lives] our spirits will be safe, well fed and watered.

v.3 He restores my soul, he guides me in paths of righteousness for His name's sake

What are our souls? Our mind and emotions basically. The bits of us which are very easily hurt and damaged. When we allow the Lord our Shepherd to come in He restores our souls. He brings healing to those hurting parts of us which don't heal naturally like our wounded bodies do.

Jeremiah 29 tells us that God knows the plans he has for us.

Psalm 119 tells us that God's Word is a lamp to our path and a light to our feet.

The Lord our Shepherd will always lead us in paths of righteousness because He can't do anything else.

What does "for His name's sake" mean? Our names identify us so that we can write to each other and distinguish people from their siblings etc.. In bible times names often reflected the nature and character of a person, so to do something for one's name's sake is to act in character for that person. God is totally righteous. It is impossible for God to act in any way other than righteousness, so He will always lead us in paths of righteousness.

When we find ourselves on unrighteous paths or see others on them – then we or they have listened to the wrong voice. There are multiple voices clamouring for our attention even in the church, to say nothing of the media etc.. Be careful which voices you listen to. Will they lead you in righteous paths? The Bible will tell you what is righteous. If they are not leading you in righteous paths then don't listen and don't follow.

v.4 Even though I walk through the (deep, sunless) valley of the shadow of death I will fear no evil, for you are with me, your rod and staff they comfort me.

When we are consciously walking behind our Shepherd and led by Him then even if the way is through the deep and sunless valley of the shadow of death we will not be afraid.

Do we know and trust our Shepherd well enough for that to be so? Are we so close to Him that we trust Him even when all is dark and desperate?

Job was a man who knew great blessing and prosperity from God. He also suffered total loss. Still he could say "*Though he slay me yet I will hope in him; I will surely defend my ways to his face.*" (Job 13:15) At this point in his life Job was struggling with what he knew of God and what he was experiencing of God. He wanted to have things out with God and he did only to be humbled by the might of God. Job surrendered to God. When the going is tough for us whether it be from false accusation, family breakdown, ill health or whatever, will we surrender to God and trust Him to lead us through the deep, sunless valley of the shadow

of death? Will we put our trust in Him to lead us in green pastures beside quiet waters or will we accuse Him of abandoning us and being unfaithful?

The Psalm tells us why we can trust Him – because His rod which is for protection and His staff which is for guidance are there to comfort us NOT to beat us. How much do we beat ourselves when we do wrong because we think we deserve it? If we repent of our sins they are removed from us and become no more. The Christian gospel says that God sent his only Son Jesus Christ to die on the cross in our place. He took the punishment which should have been ours on Himself. In Christ we are forgiven. We find this hard to believe because from infancy we have been taught that wrongdoing deserves punishment and so it does. If we are in Christ and are repentant then the punishment fell on Jesus and we are free.

Psalm 103:8-14 says

“The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love. He will not always accuse, nor will he harbour his anger forever; he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust.”

If this is how God thinks about us shouldn't we do likewise? Actually not to do so is to indulge in a works theology which says that we have to earn our way to God and that is impossible. It is to say that Christ died in vain and that is an awful thing to say.

Tough times come upon us. The valley can seem very deep and sunless but we will fear no evil because God is with us to bring us comfort. Often these times show up areas of our lives which are not surrendered to God. Rejoice in them because God has given you the opportunity to recognise and to deal with these issues so that you can become more like Jesus.

v.5 **You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.**

This verse tells us how we belong to God. We are His. Nothing can pull us down if we are surrendered to our Shepherd. In Him we are safe, secure and well fed even though our enemies are there waiting a chance to get us and pull us down. Unconfessed sin is Satan's foothold in our lives (Ephesians 4:27) especially where those sins are against others; anger, negativity, criticism, judgementalism, lying, etc.. Repent and get them out of your lives. They are ugly and do not reflect the nature of the Good Shepherd.

The Good Shepherd gives banquets for His faithful ones. He anoints them with oil as a sign of ownership (since Jesus we are anointed with the Holy Spirit as a seal of ownership) and the new wine flows in more than generous amounts.

v.6 **Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.**

What a beautiful thought. All of these beautiful things are ours if the Good Shepherd is the one who leads our lives. As people who name the name of Christ we are called to become more and more like Jesus. II Corinthians 13:10 says *“Examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realise that Jesus Christ is in you – unless of course you fail the test?”*

So how are we going to grow and know this relationship with God? – Give our lives to Jesus

1. Deal with sin – repent regularly. Examine your heart regularly, in good times and bad.
2. Read the Word – often. Let it speak to you, challenge you and tell you about the Good Shepherd and the paths of righteousness He has for you to walk. Let it light your way.
3. Worship – on your own and with others. Worship develops intimacy with God and it involves the whole of ourselves. It focusses us on God.
4. Trust – put your hope in God. Psalm 42:5 and 43:5. *“Why are you downcast O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God for I will yet praise Him, my Saviour and my God.”*
5. Pray – get to know the voice of your Shepherd, the Saviour of your soul. Learn to recognise His voice. John 10:27-30 *“My sheep listen to my voice, I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no-one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. I and the Father are one.”*
6. Make sure you are following the Good Shepherd and only Him. There are bad shepherds around who lead the unwary astray.
7. Enjoy life in the house of the Lord – forever.

Canberra

Christian Fellowship in the Methodist tradition

Join us to Worship God

5-00pm, Sunday 28th November 2004

Preacher: Rev. Ross Kingham

Subject: On Dangerous Ground - The Place To Be
Matthew 2:13-21

We meet at the
Campbell Gospel Chapel,
Chauvel St., Campbell
on the 4th Sunday of the month

What is happening over Christmas?

Rev. Ross Kingham will preach on Sunday 28 November 2004, 5-00pm
Carols at Campbell - **Saturday** 11 December 2004, 7-00pm. WE ARE INVITED.
Christmas Carols plus items with a multicultural flavour – Sunday 19 December 2004, 6-00pm at the Gospel Chapel.
Christmas Day – No service of our own.
4th Sunday – 26 December 2004, no service planned.
Sunday 8 January 2005 – Nothing planned.
Sunday 22 January 2004 – Worship service **6-00pm**.

Tuesday Bible Study

A Bible study group led by Joyce Hall meets at the Gospel Chapel on Tuesday mornings at 10am. The study is followed by a cuppa. For more information contact Joyce on 62412085.

The Windmill – November 2004

'The Windmill' is the magazine of O'Connor Uniting Church where one of the Reforming Alliance meetings was held.

Rev. Brian Thompson, writing in the November issue says "*Is the Uniting Church in trouble?* [He then briefly mentions a number of historical disagreements and splits within the Christian Church.] *The current debate about sexuality is not unimportant. It strikes at the very heart of the Gospel. It's about law and grace, about right and wrong, about compassion and hardheartedness but most of all it's about living in our times. There is no doubt that the Bible has a clearly defined sexual ethic which doesn't leave much room for interpretation. ... Maybe the bigger issue is how do we maintain the unity of the Spirit while we wrestle with contemporary issues. ... Maybe it's not so much about sexuality as about our relationship and trust in God; ... Let's pray for God's will to be done in these days.*"

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