

Living with courage in a fearful world

A collection of local and global reflections

lentevent 



UnitingWorld
connecting communities for life

2019

**“Courage is not simply one of the virtues, but
the form of every virtue at its testing point.”**

–C.S. Lewis

Living with courage in a fearful world



This year's UnitingWorld reflections for Lent focus on courage – the courage to live in difficult times, to love, to hope, to speak out, to live beyond our comfort zones. We asked the Moderators of each Synod of the Uniting Church in Australia to tell a story of everyday courage from their own lives and to choose a passage from the Bible to reflect upon with some follow-up questions for you to discuss. We've added a global dimension by suggesting you watch inspiring stories of courage from our friends in Timor Leste (East Timor) and here in Australia, with ideas for conversation that link broadly to the themes we've considered locally.

We hope you enjoy your time together, discussing and prayerfully reflecting on what it means to have courage in a fearful world. Our very sincere thanks to Rev David Baker, Rev Sue Ellis, Rev Sharon Hollis, Rev Steve Francis, Rev Thresi Mauboy and our friends in Timor Leste.

Find prayers on PowerPoint for each week at www.lentevent.com

Download the full set of short video stories of change at www.lentevent.com/be-inspired

Questions or feedback? Get in touch at info@unitingworld.org.au

Wishing you courage this Lent,
The Lent Event Team.

About UnitingWorld

UnitingWorld is the international aid and partnerships agency of the Uniting Church in Australia. We work for a world where lives are whole and hopeful, free from poverty and injustice.

We connect people and communities in Australia, the Pacific, Asia and Africa to work together to overcome poverty and injustice. To achieve this, we help the church here in Australia to be effective global partners who are passionate about God's mission in the world and their role in it.

Lent Event is an opportunity to connect more deeply with UnitingWorld and our church partners overseas.

Lent Event

For more than a decade, Lent Event has invited the Australian Church into a deeper understanding of poverty and highlighted the imperative for Christians today to embrace those on the margins, to seek justice and share resources.

Our theological reflections, videos, worship resources and daily prayers provide a catalyst for people and communities across Australia to connect with the lives of our brothers and sisters in Christ around the world, to listen to their voices and learn from their experiences.

Our prayer is that along the way you will be challenged and inspired to live simply, be in solidarity with our neighbours and act to end poverty.

A word about Lent



-REV DR CLIFF BIRD

Journeying with Jesus toward Jerusalem and beyond

The gospel writers Matthew, Mark and Luke present Jesus' journey toward Jerusalem as an invitation for us to join Jesus on the way. According to Luke's gospel, immediately after Jesus 'set his face to go to Jerusalem' (9:51) comes the narrative of 'the would-be followers of Jesus' (9:57-62). All three men for various reasons did not follow Jesus on the journey. Luke's question for us, therefore, is will we follow Jesus on the way to Jerusalem, or do we have other more urgent tasks to attend to? Lent can be a time to respond to Jesus' call to join him on the journey to Jerusalem and beyond. We do this as disciples of Jesus today.

Engaging in the (re)building of relationships

The essence of Easter is about reconciliation – the renewed relationship of humanity with God, of humanity with each other, and with God's 'very good' creation.

Lent provides an occasion for us to mend broken relationships and build new ones and the opportunity to right the wrongs of both past and present. Lent also provides an opportunity to repent from the ways in which we trample upon the Earth.

Imposing limitations

Various practices of self-imposed limitations and restraint are traditionally exercised during Lent. These include observing a fast, giving up unhealthy habits, foregoing some level of comfort and luxury (for those who have them) or giving up certain foods and drinks. The motivation for such self-imposed limitations is quite noble – it is not simply an inward journey of desiring to be more Christ-like, but also an outward journey of being an agent of God's love and compassion to a world that is hurting. To be Christ-like is to move toward a fuller realisation and sense of our common humanity. Lent provides an occasion for us to give up a part of ourselves in order that another may have the chance to live.

Stories to guide us on the journey

One useful and now common way of looking at the Bible is in terms of stories – stories about people, their cultures, experiences, fears and hopes. Interwoven with these human stories are stories of God and stories about God as experienced and understood by the storywriters. We read these stories, learn from them, ask questions and think about how they do or don't resonate with our own. How might the stories in the Bible guide and empower us as our own stories continue to unfold and develop before us and before God?

During Lent, let us strive to discern how God's story of hope in Jesus Christ helps us to live and shape our own stories.

Week One

THE COURAGE TO LIVE IN THE NOW AND THE NOT YET

Rev. David Baker
Synod of Queensland



A story of courage

For my mother, having a significant mental illness as a woman in rural Queensland in the late 1950s was a significant challenge – as well as for Dad, an enthusiastic, outgoing Methodist minister. Mum’s journey through what would be later diagnosed as bipolar disorder, lasted the whole of her adult life; it included significant periods of hospitalisation over years of treatment that was quite experimental and very confronting. While the church community was tremendously supportive, some of mum’s behaviours challenged social norms and expectations. She battled with mania and depression while seeking to support dad’s ministry – in response to the family and community expectations of a good minister’s wife – all while raising three boys. I remember Dad reflecting on those earlier years and saying that sometimes he really didn’t know what he would come home to after a day or two out doing pastoral ministry to families on sheep stations and in remote rural communities.

Yet, in the midst of it all, she lived a very fruitful and full life. It was full of music, running the home and giving leadership in the communities of faith in which we lived.

I see her, with Dad in support, as living a courageous life in a fearful world. Part of that fearful world was inside her own head; part of it was in the community which struggled then, as now, to understand mental illness. Yet she managed the way her illness played out in life, managed the expectations and judgement of others, and fulfilled her responsibilities to community and family; being the blessing to others that it was in her heart to be.

Reflection

For many of us in the West, living a life of faith is almost dependent on good mental health; we relate what we know about faith to life, and seek to live a life consistent to the values and ideals of our faith. Mental health issues challenge that presumption.

How does the faith speak to people deeply familiar with mental illness? While spiritual oppression is real, read in the light of modern insights into diseases of the mind, the stories of Jesus in the gospels give hints to other dynamics at play. They also reveal fears that can paralyse faithful action. Our fears of the unknown have stigmatised mental illness and those who are afflicted by it.

Read Mark 5:1-17

'Jesus Heals the Gerasene Demoniac'

This is an important story in Mark's gospel, and scholars have identified many symbolic layers in it. ¹

Discuss together

- What insight did the man have about Jesus? What was the community's response to the man?
- What challenges do you think lie ahead for the man and his community?

- After the townspeople saw the man healed, they begged Jesus to leave their neighbourhood. Why do you think they did that?
- The herd of swine numbered two thousand, a huge cost to the farmers (swineherds). Is healing worth the cost to a community?
- How does this speak to your church or community's response to those suffering spiritual oppression or mental illness?

Read Psalm 22

'Plea for Deliverance from Suffering and Hostility'

The Psalms give another window into a life impacted by mental distress. One third of the Psalms are 'psalms of individual lament'; that is, songs that speak of mental distress and disorder. Their great gift is that they model that there is nothing that God cannot bear to hear from us. That no matter what, God will not turn away.

Discuss together

- What insight does this Psalm give you into people who live with mental illness?
- The Psalm inevitably ends with a sense of reorientation, of reconciliation, of faith and hope. But that's still a promise yet to be realised for many. How might you bear faith, hope and love with people who live with mental illness? People who live in the difficult tension between the 'now' and the 'not yet'?

¹ See for example Stephens, S 2007, *The mentally handicapped and the demonic*, <http://www.faith-theology.com/2007/09/mentally-handicapped-and-demonic.html>

Going Global

Our friends in Timor Leste (East Timor) live in the tension between what has been promised and what is yet to come. Watch the introduction to our Lent Event video series to learn more:

www.lentevent.com/be-inspired

During Indonesia's occupation of Timor Leste (1975-1999), the Church was the only independent body within the country capable of reaching the outside world to communicate what was happening. Church leaders, particularly Catholic leader Bishop Belo, were central in calling on the United Nations to pay attention to the genocide within Timor Leste and organise a vote for independence. Amid widespread violence and oppression, Christians bravely sheltered resistance fighters, women, children and others targeted by the military.

Discuss together

- What do you personally remember from the time of Indonesia's occupation of Timor Leste? Do you recall anything of the Church's role in the independence movement?
- Discuss what it must be like for people of faith to hold hope that God is alive and active while also having lived—and continue to live—through such distress and suffering.

Prayer

- Spend time praying for all those who live in the difficult tension between 'the now' and the 'not yet'. Despair and distress are a reality not to be glossed over or dismissed, yet even in its midst, people find the courage to live faithfully.

- Give thanks for those you know who struggle with these realities, particularly for those who live with mental illness and those who love them. Pray for our health system and those who make decisions affecting people with mental illness. Pray for those who work in distressing situations like those faced by our partners in Timor Leste, and give thanks for the courage of all those who find faith in the midst of heartache.





Closing Prayer

Our God

Too often we've been on the side of the powerful
Seen history only through the eyes of those with the strength to tell our
story loudly,
Been unaware of what was done in our name.

Give us the humility to hear from those left behind
Whose voices shake with fear or anger
Whose voices we ignored when we could have used our own to speak
for their freedom
Whose lives we simply overlooked in our busyness,
In our daily routines of family, work and worship.

We ask for forgiveness – from our neighbours and from you, God.

We think of men, women and children in Timor Leste and other places,
Here in our neighbourhood
Who hold tight to the promise of your presence and fuel their hopes for
the future
With the sure knowledge of your faithfulness.
We give thanks for their courage and for the encouragement they are to
us
And ask that we might work together to bring hope and wholeness.

Amen.

Week Two

SPEAKING THE TRUTH WITH COURAGE

Rev. Sue Ellis
Synod of South Australia



A story of courage

In the early 1990's, as part of the Reconciliation movement, I mustered my courage and decided to take part in the South Australian version of the About Face program. This involved a weekend exposure to the life and experience of Patricia, an Aboriginal person living in Port Augusta, a place where I had lived and taught. I was billeted in Patricia's home. She shared her story of being raised at the Point Pearce mission, a place where language and culture were denied to her. Her story shocked and confronted me.

I too had grown up on the Yorke Peninsula of South Australia, only 30 kilometres from this woman. How different our lives had been! I remember our football team played the Point Pearce team back then. I was at first inquisitive then fearful of these different people who seemed to live so roughly. When the mission school children moved to my school, I was one of the children chosen to orient the newcomers to our school and our ways.

Listening to Patricia's story years later, I realised I had been part of the assimilation policy of the day and how much I had contributed to the racism that she and others had faced – and still face today. It took all my courage to admit this before the group and to apologise for my ignorance and lack of compassion and advocacy before that time.

Reflection

Read Mark 7: 24 – 30

'The Syrophenician Woman's Faith'

A challenging but illuminating episode in Jesus' journey. How can we learn to speak the truth with courage?

Jesus is on a Messianic mission. He has come from feeding the five thousand and healing the sick near the Sea of Galilee to the Gentile territory of Tyre. A Syrophenician woman exhibits great courage as an indigenous woman, coming into the house and approaching Jesus—a Jewish foreigner—to ask for the healing of her daughter. Jesus' response to her passionate plea is surprising. "Let the children be fed first," he replies (7:27). He is referring to the children of Israel (the Jewish people) and reveals his messianic mission. He continues, "for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs." Jews considered dogs as lowly and unworthy.

The insult of inferring the woman is a 'dog' suggests Jesus is shaming the unclean Gentile woman. "Sir, even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs." she retorts (7:28).

Jesus has talked about dogs from a derogatory Jewish perspective, but the Gentile woman starts talking about dogs as if they have a particular place in her household, eating the children's crumbs off the table. She refuses to have her daughter placed outside the boundaries of Jesus'

power to heal. She turns a metaphor for exclusion, 'food for the children,' into a metaphor of inclusion, 'crumbs for the dogs.' From the Syrophenician woman's viewpoint, there is similarity between dogs and children, whereas Jesus, from a Jewish context, sees only difference. In redefining the place of 'dogs', the woman challenges who Jesus will feed and heal.

Discuss together

- Where do you see courage displayed and what fears were overcome by the characters in each of the stories?
- What do you think made Jesus change his mind?
- A comment by Joan L. Mitchell – "In the Syrophenician woman's story, Mark's gospel points to dialogue as potential space where people can entertain one another's truth claims, deconstruct oppressive social reality, and construct inclusive Christian community."² Do you agree? Is dialogue such a space in this story or others in the Bible?
- In an age of an increasingly polarised politics and negative online debates, what can we learn from the exchange between the Syrophenician woman and Jesus?
- Are there places where courageous dialogue could be fostered by your Christian community? How about by each of us personally?

² Mitchell, JL 2001, *Beyond Fear and Silence*, Continuum, New York

Going Global 🌐

It's never easy to stand up and speak courageously, challenging the accepted wisdom of the day. In Timor Leste, the Church has taken on the role of defending children in a culture where young people are often undervalued because so many adults have themselves suffered trauma. In poor communities or places where violence has been normalised for decades, families can be unaware of—or unwilling to face—the damage done to children through neglect or abuse. The Church is bravely opening up conversations around child protection, children's rights and how to spot signs of abuse in defiance of a culture that tends towards silence and protecting perpetrators in fear of families losing face. It is doing so with respect and courage because it passionately believes that children are the future hope of the nation.

Watch the second Lent Event video, 'Truth with Courage' at www.lentevent.com/be-inspired

Discuss together

- What stood out to you personally after watching this video about the challenges faced by the children of Timor Leste?
- What sort of difficult conversations do you think would arise for our church partners as they grapple with the accepted use of violence within the families they work with?
- The Syrophoenician woman was willing to speak up with truth and courage for the health of her child. What can we do here in Australia to ensure the health and protection of children

everywhere, including places like Timor Leste, where 70% of people live on less than \$2 a day?

Pray

- Spend some time praying together for the political conversations that are taking place around the inclusion of Australia's First Peoples in national life and for the everyday conversations that happen about race in Australia. Ask for grace, patience and the ability to listen to one another in these dialogues.
- Pray for our partners in Timor Leste as they teach and train leaders about the rights of children, how to spot and address abuse and family violence and as they confront perpetrators. Pray that this narrative about the role and importance of children would be understood and accepted in a culture numbed by oppression and violence.



Closing Prayer:

'We are the children of Timor Leste'

Dear God,
We are the children of Timor Leste dreaming of the future
We are born to families too poor to help us finish school,
Our leaders have often had to show the way in secret during war and conflict,
And we are still learning how to use our voices
But our ideas shine bright

God hear us: we are the children dreaming of the future.

We are the children longing for safety
In places where war has robbed our parents of their childhoods, their memories
Their families, their feelings
We do not want to be the victims of violence, in our homes or on the street
And we need people to stand up for us, creating a better way

God hear us: we are the children longing for safety.

We are the children looking for love
Among our friends, within our families, in the heart of the God we hear about
From our leaders and Sunday School teachers who tell us we are worth it
We want to believe, but hoping is hard

God hear us: we are the children looking for love.

We are all your children and we pray for our friends in Timor Leste
Teaching, guiding, nurturing and loving in your name
Give us the courage to stand beside our neighbours as they build a nation
And to see each child as precious as our own

God hear us. We are all your children.

Amen.



Week Three

THE COURAGE TO LOVE

Rev. Sharon Hollis

Synod of Victoria and Tasmania



Cautionary note: The following story contains a suicide.

A story of courage

Just over five years ago, two police came to my door to tell me my beloved partner Michael had died by suicide. My world as I knew it came to an end. One of the things that continues to amaze me about the couple of days after Michael's death was the number of friends and family who came to my house to sit with me, to comfort me.

Grief is raw, and it takes courage to go to someone who is grieving. It takes even more courage to stay with a grieving person, reading their needs, talking when they want to talk and staying silent when they need that. Crying, laughing, howling, praying with the grieving one – these are acts of courageous solidarity. I continue to be grateful to those who came and who were not overcome by the grief in our house. Such loving, courageous accompaniment brought me comfort and hope. It gave me the assurance that I was not alone. These faithful friends and family were bearers of God's love, reminding me that God had not abandoned me.

One of the decisions I had to make in the hours after Michael's death was what I would say about the nature of his death. I was aware of the stigma of suicide and fearful of how his death might cause people to judge him or me. Would I be brave enough to tell the truth or would I allow the fear of stigma to keep me silent? I chose the truth and have not regretted it, even when the blunt truth makes people feel awkward or they say something inappropriate or hurtful. The truth means I am never ashamed of Michael and don't spend time weaving half-truths.

Read 1 Corinthians 13: 1-13

'The Gift of Love'

We hear it read at many weddings. But do we also think of the love demonstrated by Jesus when we hear it?

Reflection

The reading I chose for Michael's funeral was 1 Corinthians 13. I chose it because I knew I needed to be reminded that love would companion me through my grief, that while my grief was deep and profound, God's love would not be defeated by it. I knew I needed to be reassured that no matter how hopeless and pointless Michael's death seemed, he was held though it by a love that endured with him through death and brought him home to eternal life.

As great as 1 Corinthians 13 is for weddings, we rob it of its power when we limit our understanding of love to that of a married couple. The love Paul speaks of is best understood in the life of Jesus.

As Christians, we can have confidence that love bears all things, believes all things and endures all things because the love of God wore human flesh in Jesus Christ. Love taught radical welcome and unearned forgiveness. Love wept at the death of friend and called the sick back to life. Love endured the cross, bearing all human injustice, suffering and sin. Love rose again that we might know that love is not defeated.

Love continues to live in our midst, companioning with us through suffering, standing with victims, resisting evil and being in solidarity with the poor.

I learnt in the days after Michael's death that faith and hope are made real in acts of love that are gifts of God's love.

Discuss together

- What helps you reach out in love when it is difficult or painful?
- What Bible reading would you choose for the funeral of a loved one to remind those gathered that God is with us? Why?
- How do we know we are loved by God?



Going Global 🌍

Among some of Timor Leste's poorest families in the mountainous interior region, we met Maria and her family. Recovering from tuberculosis with the encouragement and support of the local clinic, who see their care as an expression of God's love for their community, Maria told us what gave her the courage to keep living when for many, a diagnosis of tuberculosis is a death sentence.

Watch the third Lent Event video, 'The Courage to Love' at www.lentevent.com/be-inspired

"Hope has two beautiful daughters: anger at the way things are, and the courage to see that they do not remain the same." This quote from Augustus of Hippo sums up the approach of so many people who live with diseases that are the product of poverty. Maria told us that while at first she felt anger and despair, asking herself why she should suffer when she had so much to do and so many to care for, she ultimately found the courage to take action because of the love of her family and the love of her God.



Discuss together

- When you see suffering either at home or in the world around you, do you tend to lean more toward anger and despair or to love that motivates you to act? Why do you think that is?
- A lot of research suggests that 'bad news' makes people get angry, take notice and get involved in action (for example, donating to bring change) much more than good news – like Maria's story of hope and love. Why do you think that is?
- Which stories are more likely to make you support a cause? Which stories are you more likely to share (for example on social media or in conversations with friends) and why?

Pray

- For those who suffer and for those who have the courage to respond with love and hope.
- Give thanks for those who work on the frontline of suicide prevention and response; for the open sharing of Rev. Sharon Hollis's story and all those who stood with her and opened God's love to her.
- For people everywhere who are God's love in so many ways and who provide people with the courage they need to live through the unthinkable.
- For families like Maria's, who each day experience challenges we find it difficult to imagine, and who together draw on their faith in in God and each other to bring about healing and hope.

Closing Prayer

Jesus who healed the sick, touched the hands of lepers and the eyes of the blind:

We give you thanks for the miracle of modern medicine

For the commitment of all who study and give their lives in the service of others

We thank you for clinics, hospitals and doctors

Nurses, technicians and educators around the world who bring
Health and hope back into the lives of millions.

We think especially today of our friends in Timor Leste

For women, men and children in their thousands who've seen pain transformed

And the many more who continue to suffer

We ask that we, like the Christ we follow,

Might bind up wounds and bring healing

In our prayer, our giving and our acting together this Lent.

Amen.



Week Four

THE COURAGE TO CONNECT

Rev. Thresi Mauboy
Northern Synod



A story of courage

I have always been encouraged by the stories of the many different people who came together to form the Uniting Church in Australia. As an Indonesian-born woman, ministering in the Northern Territory as Moderator, I have sometimes felt overwhelmed by the task before me. I remember clearly when I was first called to consider the position, I thought I must have been invited into the office because I was in some kind of trouble! I could not even bear to tell my family about it until we had prayed together. It was my son's enthusiastic hug and cry of, "I believe you can do this, mum!" that really gave me the confidence to

take on the role. All this time, the idea that I am not alone in this ministry—that I am just one part of a bigger body—has spurred me on.

I've often sat with our First Peoples to hear stories of joy, challenge, heartbreak and hope. They each play a role in the mission of the Church even when their voices and experiences are overlooked. When I travelled to the land of Papua (West Papua) to hear from our partner church there, I was welcomed as a sister and assured of love and support in all that God is doing here in Australia, just as I told them we are supporting them in their care for the sick and the poor in their own place. In the Pacific, I sat with women who have experienced terrible violence and I offered communion to brothers and sisters in Fiji, joining with young people in a vibrant service of worship that inspired in me hope for the future.

Not long after I took up my position as Moderator for the Northern Synod, I was asked to speak at the opening of Parliament where I reminded our politicians of love's call – truth telling, open hearts, humility, bringing people together as one. This spoke to me of the desire of politicians to hear the voice of the Church reminding them of their own call and of their eagerness to see the Church active in the community.

Through all this I am reminded that the only way to achieve all this is to have the courage to join hands and walk forward together; whatever our nationality, mother tongue or skin colour; making the most of our strengths wherever our ministry might be.

We truly are one body with many parts.

Read 1 Corinthians 12: 12-27

'One Body with Many Members'

Unity is at the heart of our church. Seeking fellowship with the “one body” of Christ is vital to our lives as disciples of Jesus. Is Paul’s message to the church in Corinth just as relevant for us today?

Discuss together

- If you were to imagine God’s work in the world as a body, what part might you be? An ear, listening? The stomach, processing and digesting? Hands, actively tending to things?
- *The members of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable and those that we think of with less honour we clothe with greater honour...* (12: 22-23). What do you think Paul means by this?
- What do you think are some of the ‘weaker’ or ‘less well respected’ aspects of ministry within the Uniting Church? How might you be part of giving these ministries honour and respect?
- Who are the different ‘body parts’ in your church or wider social network you can count on for support in your daily life?
- How does this image of the body give you courage to play your role (and allow others to play theirs) in the sometimes-overwhelming world we live in?



Going Global 🌐

In 2010, Glebe Road Uniting Church in Ipswich began exploring the idea of connecting with a project overseas and the people who run it. They were motivated by the idea that they could lift their eyes beyond their own horizon – a typical Queensland community, no more affluent than the next, but with a heart for others and resources to share. The church began a partnership with the Church in Timor Leste that has changed many lives.



Watch the fourth Lent Event video, 'Courage to Connect' at www.lentevent.com/be-inspired

Discuss together

- In what ways do you think Glebe Road UC's approach reflects the idea that we are all part of the body of Christ?
- How do you think being involved in a project like this would give an Australian community courage to face their own particular challenges?
- Has your church been involved in supporting a project through UnitingWorld or another organisation? Do you see brothers and sisters in developing countries as having strengths we can learn from or have you tended to regard most projects you give to as simply donations to the less fortunate?

If you're interested in supporting a project through UnitingWorld, please get in touch. We can help you with planning and learning about the project and people with whom you'll partner, financial management of your giving, meeting with staff who might be visiting from your project and facilitating prayer requests between your congregation and your project. Email: info@unitingworld.org.au



Closing Prayer

Our God, we are one body, one church, called to your world

And to each other in love and service:

When one part rejoices, we all rejoice

When one part suffers, we all suffer.

Today we rejoice with our brothers and sisters in Australia-

Faithfully reaching out over many years to connect with churches

In Asia, Africa and the Pacific as missionaries, volunteers, workers of many types

We are thankful for their passion

Today we give thanks for our brothers and sisters across the globe

Faithfully reaching back over many years to connect with us

Providing hospitality, insight, gifts of generosity and wisdom and nurture

We are thankful for their passion

God give us eyes to see you at work in the world

And courage to join you and your people

Building your kingdom

Amen.

Week Five

COURAGE BEYOND THE COMFORT ZONE

Rev. Steve Francis

Synod of Western Australia



A story of courage

I first met Mary one Sunday morning when she came to church with her husband. Both were Chinese nationals. Mary had recently come to Australia having completed a PhD in the UK. She and her husband were part of the 'Tiananmen Square generation' of Chinese students who had witnessed the tremendous cost students paid by standing up for justice, democracy and freedom at a time where such concepts were devalued by Maoist ideology. While in England, Mary wanted to improve her English, so began attending a church that offered English conversational classes. During those conversations, the unique claims of Jesus Christ surfaced, and Mary was drawn to the gospel narrative. In time, she became a Christ follower and gave over her life to the Prince of Peace. A job offer brought her to a university in Australia and her search for a church began. On her first Sunday morning, she noticed several other Asian people in the congregation and began to feel at home. Mary and her husband were not content to be mere pew sitters. Their experience of Christ was so deep and profound that they began to look for ways of serving Christ and their beloved Chinese community. Eventually they approached the minister and asked if he could help them in forming a small conversational English class with the New Testament as the text. The group began with four members. Today, over a hundred students come to the ESL group. Mary understands the struggles that many overseas students have when they arrive in a strange country. She and her team love and serve the Chinese community in so many ways; English tuition, finding furniture and fridges, giving advice on part-time jobs, offering hospitality, prayer, Christian discipleship and pastoral support. Mary is a peacemaker, she brings people together in the name of Christ and helps others discover the *shalom* of God.

Read Mathew 5: 1-11

'The Beatitudes'

Mahatma Gandhi once said, "Christ's Sermon on the Mount fills me with bliss even today. Its sweet verses have the power to quench my agony of soul." Does it have the same effect on us Christians?

Reflection

Lent is a good time to think about peace. It is a season for Christians to step back from the busyness and the fast pace of life to consider the core virtues of what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. Central to the gospel and the ministry of Jesus was a call to live out the peace of God. On a Galilean hillside Jesus gave his epic teaching, his manifesto for living a God-centred life that we call the Sermon on the Mount. It reminds us of the blessings of life when lived God's way. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons and daughters of God" (Matthew 5:9). Is there a higher calling than this? As Scott McKnight puts it, "peace is one of those great Biblical words that captures the entire intent of God for God's people. God wants us to dwell in peace."³ This does not simply mean living in the absence of conflict, living in a place of truce or ceasefire. It means seeking to practice grace, reconciliation and forgiveness, actively seeking the wellbeing of individuals and our society. The rich Hebrew word *shalom* carries with it the godly desire for people to rise beyond conflict and fear

³ McKnight, S 2014, *Kingdom Conspiracy: Returning to the Radical Mission of the Local Church*, Brazos, Grand Rapids USA.

and live with justice in deep respect for each other. In Jesus Christ, we see the difficult art of peacemaking being practiced. Sometimes it means going the extra mile; turning the other cheek and refusing to seek revenge. On other occasions, it means offering words and prayers of comfort, kindness and support to others. Peace that is shaped by Jesus, the Prince of Peace, means paying careful attention to those who are doing it tough; the aged pensioner, the lonely student, the struggling mother, the recently bereaved, the refugee and the jobless. Sometimes it means championing their cause or looking for ways of including them. Jesus also reminds us that peace is a gift from God. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you" (John 14:7). In intentionally serving Christ and others we do not earn God's peace, but we receive it as a fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22). Are you a peace maker or just a peace lover?

Discuss together

- What is a peacemaker? Is it different to being a "do-gooder?"
- Reflect on all the blessings in the Beatitudes. What do they have in common? (Structure, themes, content). What is Jesus doing?
- Can you think of times when Jesus brought peace through healing or teaching? Did he ever disturb the peace? Why?
- Think about your faith community. Do you have examples of times when conflict has been poorly resolved? How can the church develop better peacemaking skills?

Going Global 🌐

One of the legacies of the conflict in Timor Leste, which saw more than one third of the population killed or starved during the Indonesian occupation, is very poor health. The country has one of the highest rates of child malnutrition in the world; highly contagious respiratory diseases like tuberculosis are rife. In this setting, our church partners go to remote rural areas, into people's homes, to teach them about the simple measures they can take to help protect their families from disease.

Watch the fifth Lent Event video, 'Courage Beyond the Comfort Zone' at www.lentevent.com/be-inspired

Albert, Ana and other health workers live very simple lives themselves, often facing the same challenges as those within the communities they serve. They also risk poor health and at times, their wages are not adequate to cover their needs. Health workers are in demand everywhere. They say they serve because they want to use the skills they've been blessed with to end suffering and build their community.

Discuss together

- Do you think some people genuinely have a special call in order to be able to work in these conditions, or do you believe some simply have the courage, determination and compassion to make it work?
- Have you ever felt called or challenged to go beyond your comfort zone to provide care for someone in physical need? What gave you the courage to do that? What were the benefits for you and for the person you cared for?

Pray

Spend some time together giving thanks for those who have the courage to reach out to others to bring peace in many different ways; those like Mary who provide a place of welcome and practical resources here in Australia, and our partners in Timor Leste who give people the knowledge they need to avoid and recover from disease. Pray that we might be tempted beyond our own comfort zones to notice, find and reach those who need our support.

When you 'pass the peace' during worship on Sunday, do it more prayerfully than before.



Closing Prayer

It's the simple things, God, that make such a powerful difference:
Washed hands that stop the spread of disease
Water from a clean source
Vegetables as well as rice
Planning for child birth so that families are not stretched to breaking point
Knowledge that is gifted and greeted with wonder
And well within our reach to gift again and again and again!

We give you thanks for all those who go out to teach and to give,
For the courage of those who give up better employment and safer roads
To travel among those who are ready to listen and desperate for change.

We thank you for projects in Timor Leste and beyond
For leaders, teachers, educators, nurses and those they serve
For those who find healing, hope and wholeness in the hands of your church
Both overseas and here in Australia.

Set our feet on journeys beyond our usual paths
Give us vision beyond our usual horizons
And for all that we don't yet feel equipped, give us courage.
Amen.



“Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; God will not fail you or forsake you.”

-Deuteronomy 31:6

Thank you for journeying with us this Lent!

To read more about the projects mentioned here and donate to support them, visit www.lentevent.com



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