

A photograph of two women shaking hands in a greenhouse. The woman on the left is wearing a pink hijab and a patterned dress, while the woman on the right is wearing a white top and dark pants. They are both smiling. The background shows the wooden frame and plastic covering of the greenhouse, with some plants visible.

lentevent

Bible Studies
Finding Jesus in the Stranger



UnitingWorld
connecting communities for life

2020

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LENT EVENT BIBLE STUDIES 2020

Finding Jesus in the Stranger

This year's Lent Event is set in the Indonesian province of Ambon, a place of beauty and hope despite significant poverty and a legacy of violence and misunderstanding. In some ways, Ambon is a microcosm of the problems we see worldwide – and a community that demonstrates what we can achieve when we dream and work for a world reconciled.

Christians and Muslims are working together here to build lives of dignity, finding solutions to poverty and seeing each other first as brothers and sisters, despite their differences.



The Bible studies this year are written by Rev Michael Earl, the Minister of Bowral/Kangaloon Uniting Church. They reflect on the theme of 'Jesus the other' – what happens when we are confronted by those who are different; the face of Christ in unexpected people and places; the transforming possibilities of grace.

The best way to use the studies would be to read through the background notes before you meet, and then read the set text together, watch the video and discuss the questions as a group. If you haven't read the background notes before you meet, perhaps take it in turns to read the notes aloud.

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

Download the full set of short video stories of change by clicking the 'Be Inspired' tab on the Lent Event website.

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

Together as we build peace and beat poverty,

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 be effective global partners who are passionate about God's mission in the world and their role in it.



Lent Event

For more than a decade, Lent Event has invited the Australian Church into a deeper understanding of where God is working in the world to overcome poverty and injustice.

Our theological reflections, videos, worship resources and prayers provide a catalyst for people 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'll be challenged and inspired to live simply and act to end poverty.

STUDY 1:
IN HIS OWN STRANGE WAY? JESUS THE OTHER
LUKE 4: 14-30

READ LUKE 4: 14-30

***'The truth of God is found in rebellion against the repressive clichés of the world.'*¹**

In C.S. Lewis' wonderful children's book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, there's a telling exchange between the children who have found their way into the magical world of Narnia, and Mr and Mrs Beaver.

"Aslan a man!" said Mr Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. ... Aslan is a lion—the Lion, the great Lion."

"Ooh" said Susan.

"I'd thought he was a man. Is he quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion."

"That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs Beaver. "If there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly."

"Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy.

"Safe?" said Mr Beaver. "Don't you hear what Mrs Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe.

*But he's good. He's the King, I tell you."*²

Aslan is not safe, but he's good. In the stories Aslan clearly holds metaphorical significance as a Christ figure. He is the one who gives his life selflessly for the traitor Edmund on the stone table, he is 'brought back to life' by the deeper magic, he breathes new life into the characters the Witch has turned to stone, and he defeats the reign of the evil queen freeing Narnia from the grip of winter. But Aslan is not a 'tame' lion.

Aslan is not the special friend or particular ally of anyone. He does not affiliate with any one person or group any more than others. He cannot be appropriated or manipulated to any end other than his own.

Jesus, likewise, doesn't belong to anyone. He is not on anyone's 'side' in the sense of a preference for this group or that, this person or that, this cause or that – even (perhaps it would be better to say 'especially?') the Church. He is only on the side of truth, God's truth, which he reveals magnificently and sorrowfully in his life, death, and resurrection.



We tend to focus, these days, more on Jesus' humanity than his divinity. Jesus is the one born in our flesh, who had friends, who had emotions, who wept when he was upset, who washed people's feet, who needed food for nourishment and survival. In all these ways, Jesus feels very familiar to us – he is human. This is a powerful truth, God stooping down to our level, entering into our human brokenness; *Emmanuel* – God with us.

But perhaps there's a danger of assuming we can put Jesus in our pocket. It can be tempting to domesticate Jesus as a kind of sentimental personal friend ready to affirm our preferences. Or that he is in the trenches with us fighting back the oncoming wave of skepticism. We run the risk of assuming we have control or even understanding – that Aslan is a 'tame lion.'

The Uniting Church Basis of Union declares that Jesus 'constitutes, rules, and renews' the Church, 'in his own strange way'.³

This reflects the distance between us—what we expect, what we want, the norms of personhood and relationship to which we default—and the kind of God Jesus reveals. It is only 'strange' because, as the voice of the Lord from the book of Isaiah spoke long ago, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your

thoughts' (Isaiah 55: 8-9). If we could see as God sees, we might see that Jesus' 'strange' way is actually the deepest truth of life. It's only 'strange' because we're so bad at looking on the world and each other as God does.

The reading set down for today from Luke 4 shows Jesus is not beholden to anyone, nor possessed by any group. While he is received well to begin with, the tide quickly turns when the crowd realizes his words strangely do not confirm their own biases.

Jesus is the one who will, 'proclaim good news to the poor, freedom to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind.' When we've woken up to a sudden light in a dark room, it is disorientating and unsettling before our eyes adjust to the new light, the new reality, and begin to see clearly. This is Jesus. Are we prepared to be redeemed by one who disrupts our easy assumptions? Who is beyond our imaginings and confounds the shape of our desires in order to re-order them? Who was 'despised and rejected by others, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief'? (Isaiah 53:3). And yet who loves us with a love of which we can only barely scratch the surface?



QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER *(Luke 4: 14-30)*

1. Have you ever suddenly seen a familiar situation through the eyes of an outsider, and the shift in perspective giving you a flash of insight and clarity?
2. What is the point Luke is making about Jesus' identity in vs 14-20?
3. Jesus tells a story in vs 24-27; what do you hear Jesus saying through this story?
4. What was so controversial about Elijah being sent to a widow in Sidon?
5. Why is a prophet not accepted in his hometown?
6. Who do you think are the prophetic voices speaking to our church right now?
7. What are they saying? Are we listening? What barriers have we built up to shut out the voices?
8. How have we created spaces and places to open ourselves up to hear the outsider prophets? What more do we need to do?
9. What does a picture of Jesus who comes to us with the face of 'the other' (a different and unsettling presence) mean for living our faith in a secular, cross-cultural, multi-faith, skeptical world?

Watch Lent Event Video 1: *Build peace, beat poverty*

- What have you learnt about our neighbours in Ambon, Indonesia, from this introductory video?
- What does Jesus have to say to us through the life and witness of the Church in Ambon?

PRAY TOGETHER

- *For all those you hold in your hearts*
- *For your church and wider community*
- *For Rev John Beay and the people of Tial, Ambon*



STUDY 2:
WHEN ENEMIES BECOME FRIENDS
LUKE 6: 27-42

READ LUKE 6: 27-42

The 2010 film *Of Gods and Men* tells the true story of a community of Cistercian monks living in a monastery high in the Atlas Mountains of Algeria. In the mid-90s, Algeria was in the grip of a civil war and the reclusive monastery got caught up in the crossfire. The monks, all French, were asked to leave by the Algerian military, but at the urging of the local community and as an act of their divine calling, decided to stay among the people they had been with for years and years. The film chronicles the intense pressure and strain they felt as they, together, came to the decision not to flee to safety. In a letter written before his eventual death, the Prior of the Abbey, Brother Christian de Charge, wrote the following:

'In these thanks in which everything is said, by now, about my life, including also you, friends of yesterday and today, and you, friends of this earth, beside my mother and my father, my sisters and my brothers, a centuple given according to the promise! And you too, friend of the last moment, who did not know what you were doing.

Yes, for you as well, I want to foresee these thanks and this adieu. And that it may be given to us, blessed thieves, to meet again in Heaven, if God, our shared Father, so wishes, Amen!'⁴

'Friend of the last moment' is, of course, a reference to his killer, the one who, like those who crucified Jesus, 'did not know what you were doing.'

Here we see in moving and heart-breaking testimony the embodiment of Jesus' call to 'love your enemies'. At the point where the monks had every right to retreat into anger, hatred, condemnation and judgement, Brother Christian locates the love he himself has received in Christ and is able to call his enemy 'friend'. This is not naivete, nor a detached idealism – claims that Brother Christian knows will be made about him. No, it's a conscious choice to let love conquer death and sin. His killers could take his life, but they could never take from him his freedom to let love finally triumph. Incredibly, he even associates himself with his captor as 'blessed thieves' who, he hopes, may meet again in heaven.

Such stories put many of the petty disputes churches are renowned for in the shade. We misdirect our attention to insignificant things while Jesus is desperately trying to re-direct us to the heart of God's Kingdom and its

outworking in the world. There is no ‘other’ more ‘other’ than our enemies. We have greater reason not to love our enemies than anyone else in the world. And still, Jesus says, no, you must love your enemies, turn the other cheek, bless those who curse you, because that is what Jesus himself does by dying on the cross. Through sin we became the enemy of God, and God loved us still. What we’re called to see, like Brother Christian, is we are no less enemies of God than our enemies are. And if God loves them, then we too must follow in Jesus way and love without exception or qualification – even if it costs us our lives.

We can fail to love the ‘other’ in routine, day to day, interactions – others who are merely strangers, let alone loving our enemies which is the ultimate test of our calling in faith. Perhaps we need to start by looking at our most common relational engagements and asking ourselves what love requires of us here.

It is telling that our passage leads on from the command to love, to teaching about judgement. We live in a world where we are constantly invited to have opinions about people and events, but often with no connection or personal cost. Social media fuels outrage and indignation as we are invited to react without relationship.

Jesus’ command to love requires more of us than this. Our every encounter with another is cloaked in the truth that we too are thieves

with Brother Christian and his killer. But as Jesus says to the thief on the cross, ‘today you will be with me in paradise.’ Easter is centrally about taking this way by faith—the way to the cross, the grave, the sky—the way of our dying and rising Lord with whom we too may die and rise, and be transformed into the heavenward way of being.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER (*Luke 6: 27-42*)

1. Reflect on the picture of Jesus Luke is getting across in the Scriptural text.
2. Have you ever had any experiences where you’ve struggled to love someone, perhaps because of relationship breakdown or because you’ve been hurt in some way?
3. Have you ever had the experience of learning to love someone you started off disliking once you had a chance to get to know them?
4. Loving enemies is the ultimate test of faith, but it also says something profound about the strength of love. Love is often regarded as a ‘soft feeling’ kind of thing, yet the picture Jesus portrays of love is very different. How does this text help us reflect on the nature of love?



5. Why do we find loving in even the routine course of life so hard? What role does judgement (assumptions and opinions we harbour) have on this?
6. How is our Lenten journey informed by this story?
7. How do these reflections shape the way we think and speak about Jesus in worship and witness?

Watch Lent Event Video 2: *Mary and Attika*

- What strikes you most deeply about this story of friendship between women who could easily have been enemies?
- Since this video was made, Attika's home was destroyed in a series of earthquakes that shook the island of Ambon in September 2019. Our church partners have been distributing emergency food and supplies to people living in Attika's area, and the Indonesian Government also has plans to help with rebuilding. Attika continues to sell homecooked snacks from the ruins of her home and is living under a tarp, as are many others, while she saves more money to try to rebuild. Check the Lent Event website for updates about her family.

PRAY TOGETHER

- *For those you hold in your hearts*
- *For your church and community*
- *For Mary, Attika and other members of the Waali community as they build peace together and recover from the Ambonese Earthquakes*



Attika in her shop before it was destroyed in the earthquake

STUDY 3:
THE GOOD SAMARITAN? THE CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS OTHER
LUKE 10: 25-37

READ LUKE 10: 25-37

'Who is my neighbour? is a central question in the church and in congregations today.'⁵

I went to a church which was generally welcoming and loving and sought to live as a community of Christ as faithfully as it could. It was predominantly Anglo-Celtic. In a meeting, one of the members asked the council for support (financial and otherwise) for an African family based well beyond the bounds of the parish. This parishioner worked with communities in a part of the city where ethnic, racial, religious, and economic challenges were very prominent.

Quick as a flash, one of the older members said, 'Well, why would we help them? They're nothing to do with us?' The Pastor, in response, said, 'Because they have a need and our friend is aware of it and we're her church. She has brought this to our attention. Why wouldn't we help them?' A kind of uneasy silence filled the air at that moment until it was agreed that we should see what we could do, and the conversation went on.

We see here a clash of attitudes about how we might relate to those who are different from us. Although it was only the one dimension of 'otherness' that was named explicitly – that the African family were not 'of our parish' – likely there were also other aspects tied up in the old lady's response as well.

The story opens the question of what it means to follow Jesus in a context where vast differences of belief, ethnicity, age, sexuality, gender, culture, and other aspects of our humanity abound and often engender suspicion, fear, hostility and conflict. We have considered before what it means to follow a Saviour who is 'other' to us. But what does it mean to be a follower of Christ in a world where the neighbour next door may be Muslim or Sikh, a refugee or recent immigrant who cannot speak English? Where does the call of love take us to in such a context? What does the Lord require of us?

Jesus tells the story in response to a question from an 'expert in the law' about inheriting eternal life. The expert had summarized the law correctly – love the Lord your God and your neighbour as yourself, but he wants to justify himself and so probes further. 'And who is my neighbour?'



Implicit in this question is whether there are categories or limits to who may be a 'neighbour' that might decide how we 'love' them. The Old Testament implies that neighbour could mean 'fellow Israelites' or include 'strangers and sojourners' (Leviticus 19: 33-34). Thus 'loving your neighbour' becomes a more complex question.

In Jesus' story, the Priest and the Levite know they should go over to help their fellow Israelite who had been accosted, beaten, and left for dead. Yet they don't. It is the Samaritan who risks attending to the man. The Samaritan is the religious 'other'. Jews and Samaritans, though having much in common historically, had, grown hostile towards each other. Enmity and mutual discord characterized the relationship and Jews considered Samaritans theologically misguided and inferior.

In Richard Lischer's formulation it runs, 'Are you ready to concede that the example of one 'unlike' you, might prove redemptive for you?'⁵ The actions of the Samaritan don't just see him crossing a physical boundary (the road), but a number of cultural and religious ones too. He crosses these boundaries in order to show the neighbourliness and love the expert in the law had rightly identified as sitting central to the Jewish law.

The Samaritan's actions risk his personal safety. It's a dangerous road, demonstrably beset by brigands and thieves. He risks rejection and judgement from his own people as well as the 'other'. He risks appearing

foolish. Yet he makes himself vulnerable in order to care for another.

When Jesus finishes the story he doesn't ask, 'Now do you see who your neighbour is?' He turns it around: 'Which of these was a neighbour to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?' He makes 'being a neighbour' a vocation for everyone who would heed the call of God, rather than a culturally or religiously defined identity which may mark the limits of kindness. As Mary Hinkle Shore says, 'Jesus defines "neighbour" not as someone worthy to *receive* love but as someone able to *offer* it.'⁶

Implicit here is the thought that we all might learn and grow and have our vision of God and life enlarged by *being* a neighbour to those who are different to us on the one hand and *accepting* neighbourliness from those who are different to us on the other. The dangerous road on the way to the cross may well bring us face-to-face with situations where we might be called to risk neighbourliness for the sake of a potentially new understanding of God, others, and even ourselves.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER (Luke 10: 25-37)

1. Reflect on the picture of Jesus Luke is offering in the text.
2. Place yourself as the different characters in the story – Priest/Levite, man in the ditch, Samaritan, inn keeper. How does imagining yourself as one or other of these characters change your perspective on faith, life, church, neighbours?



3. Have there been times when the witness and example of those unlike you have given you a new insight or wisdom into who you are in faith? God? Jesus? How?
4. How do these reflections shape the way we think and speak about Jesus in worship and witness?

Watch Lent Event Video 3: *Petrus and Nyoman*

- There is no social security for people with disabilities like Petrus and Nyoman in Ambon and employment is already scarce. As neighbours who belong to groups previously involved in deadly conflict, Nyoman and Petrus could easily have competed over scarce resources. Why do you think vulnerability sometimes leads to openness and generosity, and at other times to suspicion and resentment? (attitudes we see all the time in Australia).

PRAY TOGETHER

- *For those you hold in your hearts*
- *For your church and community*
- *For Nyoman, Petrus and people with disabilities in difficult circumstances everywhere*



STUDY 4:
ON HOSPITALITY
LUKE 7: 36-50

READ LUKE 7: 36-50

*'...hospitality goes beyond a warm welcome and table fellowship (though these are not out of view) to include intellectual hospitality, an openness to hear the story of the other and to receive wisdom from the stranger.'*⁹

Many of us know the moving scene at the beginning of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* with Bishop Myriel. After welcoming Jean Valjean into his house and providing a bed and food for him, Valjean steals some of the old priest's silverware and makes off in the middle of the night. The next morning Valjean is caught and returned in chains to the Bishop, no doubt now imagining his fate now awaits him in a jail cell. But Myriel sees a greater purpose at work here. He lies to the *gens d'armes*, saying he had given Valjean the silverware intentionally. He looks Valjean directly in the eye and says:

*'Forget not, never forget that you have promised me to use this silver to become an honest man. ... Jean Valjean, my brother: you belong no longer to evil, but to good. It is your soul that I am buying for you. I withdraw it from dark thoughts and from the spirit of perdition, and I give it to God!'*¹⁰

The graciousness of the initial act of food and board for Valjean is outstripped many times by this stunning gesture of hospitality. It goes far beyond saving him from a night of cold and hunger. It will set him on a new course in life. It reflects, in Robert Frost's famous words, 'the road less travelled,' both for Valjean who was caught in the downward spiral of sin, and for the Bishop who refused the tyranny of cultural convention—even of the law—and sought what Paul called, 'a more excellent way' (1 Cor. 12:31), the way of love.

This Bible reading is a complex three-way picture of the nature of hospitality. Simon, Jesus, and the woman all offer an angle on hospitality of 'the other'. Simon, as a Pharisee might have reason to be suspicious of Jesus, but he welcomes him. Jesus might have reason to be dismissive of the woman, but he affirms her. And the woman might have reason to be nervous and insecure about both of them, yet she lavishes the beautiful gift of her tears, mixed with an aromatic perfume, on Jesus for which he commends her publicly. She has shown 'great love' (v.47) despite the many apparent boundaries present and the substantial risk she takes by even engaging at all.

‘Your sins are forgiven.’, Jesus reassures her, ‘Your faith has saved you, go in peace.’ Like the scene with the old Bishop and Jean Valjean, unexpected hospitality creates a new beginning; a new possibility, a new framework of relationship. Only here it’s a nexus of the divine hospitality offered in Jesus, the woman’s extravagant blessing, all in the home of a supposedly hostile Pharisee. We see in this astonishing scene how God works mysteriously; beyond the human limitations we so often contrive.

Hospitality is especially relevant today as millions of people seeking asylum bring the question front and centre. In Australia, it’s a hot-button political issue, especially regarding people who seek asylum by boat.

Hospitality is a Christian calling, not one option among many. We can be like Simon the Pharisee who sees the sinful woman and says to himself, ‘We shouldn’t have anything to do with her, she is breaking all the rules, doing the wrong thing, upsetting the equilibrium of what’s just and fair,’ missing entirely the deep need she herself possesses.

What Simon fails to see is that the gift she brings to Jesus goes far beyond the conventional hospitality he has offered. This disreputable woman has reserves of generosity Simon barely imagines. The roles are reversed here. The religious leader is being shown what love of God and neighbour really looks like by the streetwalking stranger.

Hospitality can take many forms, but it always involves making space for the story and seeing the personhood of an ‘other’, one who is different to us. We should not fool ourselves into thinking hospitality may not be costly. Sometimes it will not be received well, sometimes it will be abused as in the case of Jean Valjean. Yet the Gospel tells us that as God makes room for us in the Kingdom—with all our flaws and angularities—we should make room for others. It might just be that in doing so, we are also making room for Jesus, who said, ‘what you did for the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER (Luke 7: 36-50)

1. Reflect on the picture of Jesus Luke is getting across in the text.
2. What do you make of Jesus’, Simon’s, and the woman’s actions/gestures in this scene?
3. What is the difference between how Jesus sees the woman, and how Simon sees her?
4. How might this scene inform our understanding of hospitality which might then apply to modern contexts of recent arrivals where, perhaps, multiple (cultural? religious? even legal?) boundaries might be crossed for the sake of welcome?



5. How is our Lenten journey informed by this story?
6. How do these reflections shape the way we think and speak about Jesus in worship and witness?

Watch Lent Event Video 4: *Friendship across boundaries*

- What strikes you most about the long-term friendship between these four women? What role do you think hospitality and welcome has played in crafting their relationships and do you see opportunities to create better relationships with people who are different in your own lives?

PRAY TOGETHER

- *For those you hold in your hearts*
- *For your church and community*
- *For opportunities in your own lives to create relationships that cross boundaries and barriers.*



STUDY 5:
WHO WOULD JESUS EXCLUDE?
ACTS 10: 34-48

READ ACTS 10: 34-48

*'...most of us come to church by a means that the church does not allow.'*¹⁵

I used to worship at church where the evening service attracted a handful of the homeless folk who slept rough in the park across the street. It was warm, welcoming and there was supper at the end of the service. I remember gathering in a large circle for communion one night, and my four-year-old son stood between me and the old man in rags whose entire earthly belongings were in the shopping cart outside the door. My son asked me afterwards why we need invite the old man who smelled bad. We had a great conversation about how his warm evening bath might be a chore for him, but an undreamt-of privilege for others, and that it was Jesus who invited the old man to the table, and that we had no more right to be there than he did.

It is hard to imagine the upheaval in the early Christian community as Jews and Gentiles were suddenly being brought together with the shocking claim that they were now 'one in Christ Jesus' (Galatians 3:28).

There were very strict rules governing how Jews were to engage with Gentiles for fear of ritual and religious uncleanness, so the early Church was seeking to be something that was unthinkable in the normal routine of things. Yet Peter, one who himself wavered on the inclusion of Gentiles in the new community (and who drew the condemnation of Paul – see Galatians 2: 1-11) preaches at Cornelius' invitation: 'God does not show favouritism but accepts those from every nation who fear him and do what is right' (Acts 10: 34-35).

From the beginning the Church was in its deepest identity an inclusive community. Christian inclusivity was organically connected into the witness of Jesus who had died and risen to bring humanity together in him. It is on Jesus' terms that we are forged into the people of God by the power of the Holy Spirit. But while we are all invited to 'come as we are to Christ', we cannot expect to stay untransformed. Just as Peter had to have his mind transformed and his vision expanded to see that in this 'body of Christ' (1 Corinthians 12:27), 'all were baptized by the one Spirit so as to form one body – whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free' (1 Corinthians 12: 13), so we too may be transformed in our thinking and begin to envisage a whole new reality.

Sadly, the church has often been a place of rejection rather than welcome. A place where prejudices which exclude those who are 'different' from the majority have driven people away from the very community that is supposed to be wholly about welcome and grace. This sin brings into the light the great challenge of faithful living and creating a community of love.

All humanity has in common our own sinfulness (Romans 3:23) and unconditional promise of God's love (Romans 8:39). There are no distinctions to be made that would cancel out those two foundational truths. Whatever our name, ethnicity, gender, family background or income, we are all in the same need of God's grace and equally loved in Christ Jesus.

Because in Christ there is a new humanity and a new creation, so the Church (the body of Christ) is called to reflect this new humanity of its Lord. When the Church excludes and rejects, when it is meanspirited and closed off to outsiders it loses its shine. The light dims, and the new humanity it is called to embrace becomes obscured.

Our rocky past in relation to any number of issues and our thoughtless and intentional exclusions mean that we should always bring a critical eye to all the Church does, seeking to ensure that that which we proclaim in our words is reflected in our deeds and there's no inconsistency. We

must continue to die to ourselves and rise again in Christ. When the Church is at its best it is a non-defensive and vibrant force for good in the world providing love and care to often the most vulnerable people in our communities. But to achieve this in any measure requires constant vigilance and curation of the way of Christ which informs a church's life. This is a task we're all called into all the time.

As we near Easter we're reminded that we are an Easter people, a resurrection people, and that means God is always offering us a new start. When we fall, God picks us up again and welcomes us back even when we've run away 'into a far country' of our own making. The Lenten journey asks us to interrogate our own approach to the world, collectively and personally, and seek to respond in love at all times. Do this faithfully, humbly, and graciously, and we will come close to living out the vocation of what it means to be the church – a people of the Lord.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER (*Acts 10: 34-48*)

1. When was the last time you had a significant change to the way in which you understood God's way of seeing the world?
2. Peter had quite a journey in his worldview as he realized what Christ's love meant for the inclusion of Gentiles in the people of God.





3. In what ways has your understanding grown over time as to the purposes of God?
4. Think about your church. Who do we exclude/include?
5. What aspects of our community needs the dying and rising power of Christ to renew and re-configure?
6. How is our Lenten journey informed by this story?

Watch the final Lent Event video: *Blessed are the peacemakers*

- What encouragement do you draw from this story of peacemaking among our neighbours in Ambon? What implications do you think the work of the church, especially among young people, could have for the future of this region?

PRAY TOGETHER

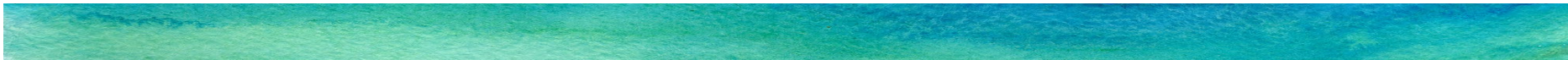
- *For those you hold in your hearts*
- *For your church and community*
- *For Rev Jeny, young people in Indonesia and Australia who are members of different religious groups that are often polarised.*





References

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- ³ CS Lewis, (2000), *The Complete Chronicles of Narnia*, (London; HarperCollins), p130
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- ⁵ Martin Luther King Jr, 'Loving Your Enemies', in Clayborne Carson & Peter Holloran, eds. 1999, *A Knock at Midnight: The Great Sermons of Martin Luther King Jr.*, London; Little, Brown & Company, p53.
- ⁶ Mary Miller Brueggemann, 'Luke 10:25-37 – Pastoral Perspective', in Cynthia Jarvis & E Elizabeth Johnson, eds., (2014), *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke, Volume 1, Chs 1- 11*, (Louisville, Kentucky, WJK), p298.
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- ⁸ Mary Hinkle Shore, 'Luke 10:25-37 – Exegetical Perspective', in Cynthia Jarvis & E Elizabeth Johnson, eds., (2014), *Feasting on the Gospels: Luke, Volume 1, Chs 1-11*, (Louisville, Kentucky, WJK)p301
- ⁹ Scott Bader-Saye, (2007), *Following Jesus in a Culture of Fear*, (Grand Rapids, MI, Brazos Press), p111.28
- ¹⁰ http://www.online-literature.com/victor_hugo/les_miserables/26/29
- ¹¹ Flannery O'Conner in one of her letters, cited in Kathleen Norris, (2001), *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*, New York, Mariner Press, p95.



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