



Keeping connected — between members of Gloucester Uniting Church on a weekly basis during this coronavirus crisis

The Messenger

Then I heard the Lord say, “Whom shall I send? Who will be my messenger?” I answered, “I will go, send me!”



A Message from UnitingWorld

— Dr Sureka Goringe, National Director

When a crisis like COVID-19 hits, it is the poor who are hit hardest.

I bring you love and greetings from our global church partners and the team at UnitingWorld. In this distressing time of uncertainty and change, if you're like me, you're probably feeling a mix of emotions – anxiety and hope; grief and determination.

Thank you for being our faithful supporters. Your generosity and compassion has changed so many lives. Every person you have helped out of poverty is in a better place to fight COVID-19 because of you. Please remember our partner church communities in your prayers. They face the challenge of COVID-19 often without healthcare, sometimes without clean water or food. This crisis will come and go, and we must survive it together. We need to be there for the long road to healing and recovery. Because we are people of hope.

Though we may be walking through the valley of shadows right now, let us do it hand in hand with God's people everywhere. Because we know God walks with us, and that dawn will come.

I pray that you and your family be strong and courageous during this time, holding onto hope and health.

And I beg that you stand with us and remember the poorest and most vulnerable in our global neighbourhood. Now more than ever, they need your prayers and your support. We'll continue to keep you updated in the coming weeks.

In hope and determination,
Dr Sureka Goringe, National Director, UnitingWorld

Last reminder for Lent Event:

If you would still like to give a cash donation, Hilary will be forwarding these to Lent Event next week, so please contact her on 6558 7436 to arrange collection.

Even a relatively small donation can make a big difference in the lives of others.

For this Sunday, April 19, the message comes to you from Marg Collett of The Collett team. The message is included in today's Messenger.

CHURCH ELDERS

- **Chairperson:** John Williamson
- **Secretary:** Kerry Chisholm
- **Treasurer:** Jenny Shaw
- **Elders:**
 - Sue Thomas
 - Colin Charles
 - Collister Reynolds
 - Bob Tebbet
 - Jeff Kite
 - Allan Cornish
 - Megan de Witte
 - David Collett

Three ways to continue your weekly church offerings

If you wish to continue to support the Church by your normal offering the following options are available.

1. Giving Direct via Uniting Financial Services

This allows members to make regular contributions to our congregation via a Direct Debit.

It also allows members to contribute to our Church on

those occasions when they are unable to attend worship in person.

Go to the following site for more information <https://www.unitingfinancial.com.au/uniting-church/giving-to-the-church/>

2. Direct Debit

You can EFT your offering direct to the church's bank account.

BSB : 634 634
A/C : 100039924
Account Name : Gloucester Uniting Church

3. Continue to place your offering in your offering envelop on a Sunday morning as part of your worship after reading the weekly reflection.

There are two options regarding the offering enve-

lopes;

(a) Contact your pastoral partner who will arrange for someone to pick-up your envelopes on a monthly basis.

(b) Retain all your envelopes until the church is reopened.

If you have any questions please contact either Jenny Shaw or John Williamson

GLoucester Uniting Church

Ministers: Every member of the congregation
Phone Secretary Kerry Chisholm 6558 4206

Project Reconnect

The sermons from Project Reconnect are now available free of charge on their Facebook page or website each week. Just go to projectreconnect.uca.org.au and click on "Sunday Messages for the COVID 19 Emergency" and you can view them.

APRIL 19TH 2020 by Marg Collett of The Collett TEAM

READINGS: Psalm 16 Acts 2:14a,22-32 1Peter1:3-9 John 20:19-31

SOME THOUGHTS ON THE GOSPEL READING

The gospel reading about Jesus appearing to the still shell-shocked disciples is a familiar one. We easily fall into the trap of saying ‘Oh yes, this is the one about doubting Thomas.’ – and leave it there. It’s not as clear-cut as that.

We don’t know where Thomas had been the first time Jesus came to the disciples in the locked room. But he was the sort of person – just as some of *us* are – who needed to know all the facts, and if things weren’t clear, would ask questions in order to be more certain. In the eleventh chapter of the same gospel when Jesus is taking the disciples to Lazarus, Thomas isn’t the only follower who misunderstands what his Master is saying. So when Jesus says they’ll be travelling to Bethany, the comment from Thomas is pessimistic, but bold: ‘*Let us also go that we may die with him.*’

The beginning of John, chapter fourteen is headed ‘Jesus comforts his disciples’. Here Jesus tells the men where he is going and reassures them that he will come back and take them to be with him. But Thomas needs to be certain: ‘*Lord, we don’t know where you are going, so how can we know the way?*’ You can almost see some of the disciples rolling their eyes at this, but I wonder if there were also those who were glad someone else had asked what they were too afraid to voice. How often do we pretend to understand, and go away thinking ‘*I didn’t get that, but I didn’t want to appear ignorant, so I let it go.*’

Thomas struggled, but he struggled honestly and he fought his way to a stronger belief. He was probably a very literal person and needed things in black and white. There is the kind of ‘closed doubt’ that avoids questioning, either out of laziness or a fear of where true knowledge might take us. I suggest that some doubting – thinking things through and questioning, rejecting rigidity and dogma – is more open, and will lead us forward in our faith. Surely doubt travels the road with most of us, but if it is an open-hearted kind of doubt, is that necessarily a bad thing? Doubt isn’t the opposite to faith, it simply speaks of uncertainty and so asks questions.

After all, the disciples had locked the door to the room ‘out of fear.’ This tells us a lot about *their* state of mind. But the door isn’t locked to Jesus. His greeting on both occasions is the beautiful ‘*Peace be with you!*’ Jesus sought out Thomas to reassure him. This disciple’s response is strong and immediate (and I find, very moving) – ‘*My Lord and my God.*’

I think there is room in God’s kingdom for all of us. Let’s face it, each of us understands and believes with a different intensity This is the result of many factors, and I think sometimes is a matter of personality. Thomas was an all-or-nothing bloke, and perhaps his doubt was a way of insulating himself against disappointment and fear. Jesus acknowledged that Thomas found it hard to believe and I don’t see any blame or scolding in his tone here. ‘Doubting Thomas’ was also ‘confessing Thomas’ once he had encountered his risen Saviour. May we also come to the point, perhaps after much doubting, when we fall gladly to our knees and call ‘*My Lord and my God!*’

SOME THOUGHTS ON PSALM 16

I’m no Biblical scholar but was intrigued by the heading ‘A *miktam* of David’ for this psalm. Even the learned ones can’t agree on the meaning of ‘*miktam*’. It’s possibly ‘gold’ or something to do with engraving or may even have been an indication of the tune to which it could be sung. I like the both ideas of gold and engraving. To see this as something precious, something worth engraving and making permanent, appeals to me. There are only six psalms that begin with ‘*miktam*’ and each of them (the others are psalms 56-60) speaks of confidence in God in the midst of trouble.

I thought I’d try to write these notes without mention of the latest C-word, but it might not be possible! If ever there was a prayer for these strange and difficult days, here it is. Notice how this lovely psalm begins: ‘*Keep me safe, O God, for in you I take refuge.*’ We don’t ask to be ‘kept safe’ if we’re *already* feeling secure. From verse one –the psalmist recognizes and owns anxiety and calls to God. Just because we’re Christians, I don’t think we’re immune to feeling fear and worry – but we do have a refuge at these times.

I was a bit confused about the second half of verse 2: ‘... *apart from you I have no good thing.*’ I thought at first that it must mean that God must be the *only* ‘good thing,’ in our lives, but I’ve come to understand it more as – that when we’re *apart* from God, nothing is good, nothing much is of any worth. There’s an emptiness when we’re away from or apart from God. Perhaps these days when so much else is stripped away, we have the chance to get to know God more.

David was no angel, and yet he had a very real relationship with God. We’re not expected to be perfect. How many of our other relationships are that? But in these verses, he’s praising a God who cares for him in all circumstances. The psalm, you’ll notice is full of the contrasts and interplay of light and dark, day and night and life and death.

It’s almost as if David becomes more settled and confident as he thinks and writes about God. I think that’s the case in our lives, too. It stands to reason that the more time we spend in God’s presence – it doesn’t have to be at church – it can be in the kitchen, the garden, out working the cattle or driving the car – the closer our relationship will become and the more we’ll be made aware of Him.

What is said in the first half, leads up to verse nine and the power of the word ‘*Therefore ...*’ David has outlined many of the ways God has shown him love and care and enriched his life. Now he speaks of the *results* of that assurance. In verse 8 – ‘*I have set the Lord always before me, because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.*’ Now he ‘rounds off’ the psalm with praise and joy that comes from this relationship. When you think of what’s happening around us, perhaps especially, but not *only* now, it’s clear that we humans have a great fear of death. But here David is speaking almost prophetically – almost as if he knew the Risen Christ. His belief is in a God who will not ever abandon him – even in death. Verse eleven is a verse of sheer delight and confidence. How much the writer enjoys having God in his life!

I often think it’s a shame that Christmas carols are put away after December 24, and we don’t sing some of the hymns set for Easter once that weekend is over. Let us try to keep that Easter Sunday feeling in our hearts. In psalm 16, David speaks of God’s care for him when things are tough. and of the closeness and joy that results from trust in God. We, who know so much more of what’s available to us can surely say ‘...*in my soul an Easter morning. I am Christ’s and Christ is mine.*’