



## UNITING CHURCH IN AUSTRALIA

### Mid North Coast Presbytery – May 1 2020

Who's got your back? One of the things that is always an encouragement to me is that throughout my life, I have known people who had my back. Way back as a teenager I was guilty of a pretty stupid act and while I knew that my mum and dad were a long way from pleased, they still had my back. Against the odds – and more than once – they were there for me. Mum and Dad are gone now, but I still have my share of personal relationships that I know I can rely on.

Relationships mean a lot and they can make one heck of a difference. As an example, I read somewhere that when the USA made the fateful decision to drop the Atom Bomb in 1945, the first choice target was not Hiroshima. The original plan was to drop the bomb on Kyoto, but the then Secretary of State, Henry L. Stimson and Mrs Stimson happened to have had their honeymoon there, and they both fondly remembered the Japanese art and culture that they witnessed. Stimson spoke to President Truman and Kyoto was spared.

Who has your back? Who are your protectors? What are the relationships that sustain you? Who is in your cheer squad? I am always encouraged by the memory, a bonus if you like, that my cheer squad has a heavenly component:

*Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith, who for the sake of the joy that was set before him endured the cross, disregarding its shame, and has taken his seat at the right hand of the throne of God. Hebrews 12: 1, 2.*

We are living in times that none of us have ever known before. It is good to know we have strong relationships that will continue to shape us and make a big difference in our lives. I encourage you to perhaps contact one of your 'cheer squad' in the week ahead.

*What's happening?* The week has been a strangely slow one for me as far as church life is concerned. I am aware that a bunch of things have been taking place, but it has been good to have been on the periphery of things for a change. The **Pastoral Relations Committee** met this week to monitor how we are travelling and keep tabs on ministry needs across our region and the Synod.

I am excited to hear that our **ministry agents** are now meeting together regularly to share their journey; exchanging ideas and encouraging one another. This of course has always been a part of our Presbytery Strategic Plan, that our leaders see themselves as members of a team for the whole of the Mid North Coast. It was difficult to organise when we were very low on numbers, but our recent influx of members has made a huge difference. The exciting thing is that we still have one more to come!

We have had a very positive response to our scheduled **Zoom Presbytery meeting coming up on Saturday May 16.** Our catering team apologise for the fact that they are not able to organise lunch for the day! It will be a great help to the presbytery Chair and Secretary, if you could make sure that you have some sort of coloured consensus cards (Orange, blue and yellow) available on the day. It is a very useful way of seeing who wants to speak and / or ask a question, and of course for voting. They don't have to be cards. You might want to be creative in how you handle this.



*A creative spirit.* Can I ask that you particularly hold our ministry agents in prayer during this time? Despite retirement I remain active in things these days, but mostly in an administrative role. This is not usually my best choice of activity, but have to say that I am pleased to be out of the regular weekly routine of planning, praying and preparing a weekly worship space. Particularly so in these times! So, if you are blessed to have a minister supporting and praying for you through these days, think about how you might support these saints in return. Hopefully you have their backs as they have yours.

*“Caminante, no hay camino  
Se hace camino al andar  
(Wayfarer, there is no way,  
You make the way as you go.  
Spanish Poet Antonio Machado*



*Finance.* Our Synod finance resource people are working hard to support us through this COVID-19 crisis. They are in constant touch with both government and Australian Tax Office people to work through various challenges. Some of you will be receiving requests from our Treasurer, Marie Battle to fill out forms – often online - that will hopefully support us going forward. Please do your best to keep up with this. For those who are now asking what forms? Relax, if you haven’t heard from us you do not need to worry.

I do want to encourage you to find a way to keep up your financial commitment to your congregation. I gave you some clues last week and commend the thoughts to you.

**HOPE:** My nature picture from the Thornton’s garden this week is a tiny bud from Veronica’s Peace Rose. I have no idea when this time of restriction and social distancing will end, but it will end! And I am feeling quite positive that we will come out of this time in better shape than when we entered it. There may only be a bud right now, but let’s wait and see what might flower.

It seems to me that we are already a better people for this time. Oh yes, we will always have the toilet paper cowboys (and cowgirls), but I am seeing and sensing a more thoughtful, certainly more creative and a more thankful church than before.

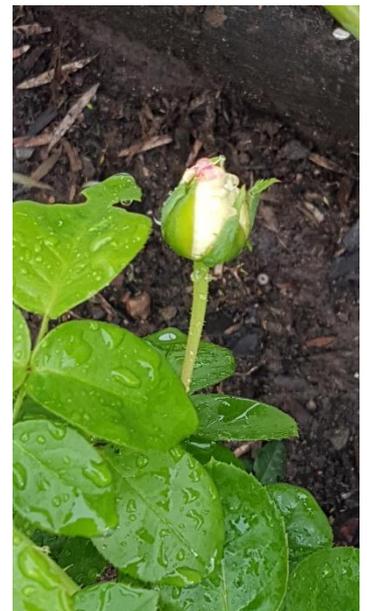
Can I encourage you in your prayers and conversations, not to be looking over your shoulder at what was, but rather look ahead to distant horizons for what might be.

I came across a story by Leonard Sweet who relates a conversation between two animals born for desert life, a grown up camel and his young son:

“Why do we have such long eye lashes, Papa?”  
 “To keep the sand out of our eyes,” Papa replies.  
 “Why do we have such big hooves, Papa?”  
 Papa answers, “To keep us from sinking into the sand.”  
 “Why do we have such humps on our backs, Papa?”  
 Papa says, “To store water in the dry, dry desert.”  
 “Why then Papa, are we living in this crazy zoo?”

We were made to be more than men and women. Through the Spirit we can become a force of nature.’

Leonard Sweet – So Beautiful – David Cook Publisher – 2009



**‘Look at the nations, and see! Be astonished! Be astounded!  
 For a work is being done in your days that you would not believe if you were told.’**

**Habakkuk 1:5**

*This is the irrational season  
When love blooms bright and wild  
For if Mary had been filled with reason  
There'd have been no room for the child.*  
Madeleine L'Engle

#### 4th Sunday of Easter

*Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit. The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep. The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. **He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.** They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers." Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.*

*So again Jesus said to them, "Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep. All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. John 10:7-10*

*For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.  
1Peter 2:25*

The good shepherd knows his own! He is the guardian of our souls. He has our back!

Grace and peace – John T

P. S.



*The new kid on the block.* Some of you would know that we lost our much loved dog Oliver late last year. Well, after some months, Veronica and John have decided that it is time for another wee pup to join the family. Please say hello to Digby. Digby is a Pugalier (Pug / Cavalier King Charles Spaniel) just eight weeks old, who is already bringing great joy – and bitten toes – into our lives.