



BELMONT UNITING CHURCH

11th April Weekly Newsletter 2021

2021 - THE YEAR OF HOPE

A Reflection for the Season of Easter (John 20: 19-31)

With the possible exception of Martha, as in "Mary has chosen the better part," there is no scriptural character more misunderstood than the Apostle Thomas.

"Doubting Thomas" as he is called and all his spiritual progeny down through the ages because Thomas lived by the adage "seeing is believing" and because he looked for certain tangible signs to shore up his belief.

Let's challenge this characterization of Thomas!

As you consider the story of Thomas after the Lord's resurrection, have you ever realized that Thomas never doubts the Risen Lord? Thomas doubts the word and the witness of the Lord's community. When the Risen One turns up a week later, Thomas is filled with faith. "My Lord and my God," he confesses.

In this story from John, it is not Christ who occasions disbelief in Thomas, but Christ's disciples gathered there in the Upper Room. Thomas simply did not find his friends a credible community.

Let's step back...What do we know about Thomas? Actually, precious little from the synoptic writers except that Thomas was chosen by Jesus to be numbered among the twelve.

Only the Gospel of John includes a few vignettes about Thomas. The story of Thomas after the resurrection becomes more intelligible in light of the other incidents John has preserved.

The first mention of Thomas is in the 11th chapter of John. Lazarus has died. Jesus has been summoned and though he delays his journey back into Judean territory, it's clear to his disciples that Jesus intends to go to Bethany, to the tomb where Lazarus has been buried. Some of the disciples think travel is really dangerous under the circumstances: the Jewish leaders were at that very moment seeking an opportunity to put Jesus to death. It is Thomas who realizes Jesus has made up his mind to go to his friends. It is Thomas who says to the others: "Let us go to die with him!" Fearless Thomas we might call him; loyal Thomas; loving Thomas. Thomas is willing to stand by Jesus, even to the point of death. He urges the others to set their faces, too, to Jerusalem.

A few chapters later John records Jesus' prayer at the last supper. Jesus is preparing his disciples for his Passover through suffering to glory – but only in a veiled way. Jesus' language is one of riddles. It is almost possible to see Thomas, brows furrowed, trying to follow the implications of everything Jesus is saying, and finally blurting out: "We don't know where you are going. How can we possibly know the way!" Thomas wasn't alone surely. The others must have been just as perplexed, but perhaps they were afraid to show their ignorance, perhaps even afraid to call attention to themselves. Minutes earlier Peter had protested his fidelity to Jesus unto death -- and Peter had been cut down to size.

(continued on page 4)



Elections for office bearers were held on Sunday, 28th March.

Those elected were

Chairperson of the Congregation: Ray Ferguson

Secretary of the Congregation: Raye Pearson

Church Council members: Brian Couper, Cherry Collins, Fay Costin, Graeme Allen, Les McCann, Liz Moss, Lorraine Rankin and Peter Woods.

Thank you to all these members for their willingness to serve.

Glen Coomber

Secretary, Church Council





Belmont Uniting Church April/May Roster 2021



Date	Time	Leader	Leader's Steward	Readers	Greeters & Ushers	PowerPoint	PA Operator	Organist
Apr 11	10.00am	G Coomber	R. Ferguson	E. Richards M. Richards	L. Moss T. Yates	L. McCann	G. Schneider	L. Rankin

Date	Communion	Flowers
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Apr 11	N/A	A. Merritt
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Date	Time	Leader	Leader's Steward	Readers	Greeters & Ushers	PowerPoint	PA Operator	Organist
Apr 18	10.00am	Rev. Ikani	R. Pearson	B. Couper	J. Stephens D. Stephens	L. McCann	R. Bunting	L. Rankin

Date	Communion	Flowers
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Apr 18	N/A	A. Merritt
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Date	Time	Leader	Leader's Steward	Readers	Greeters & Ushers	PowerPoint	PA Operator	Organist
Apr 25	10.00am	Rev. Ikani	J. Ferguson	H. McCann	J. Cocking E. Wood	L. McCann	B. Jennings	L. Rankin

Date	Communion	Flowers
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Apr 25	N/A	H. McCann
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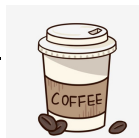
If for any reason you are unable to attend your rostered duty, please endeavour to swap with anyone & contact the worship leader

FAITH SHARING

The Faith Sharing Group is recommencing (after the pandemic shut down) on Tuesday 13th April and hoping for new participants. It meets from 10am until 11.30am every Tuesday in the church hall to discuss the lectionary readings set for the week. It is an opportunity to learn, grow and share with others in the church. You would be warmly welcomed.



Coffee after Church Service



If you would like to order a take away coffee or a cup of hot chocolate this Sunday, see Jeannine Oman in foyer when you arrive.

Cafe CBD will prepare your order to be ready by the end of our worship service.

Prayer Points For the Week

Loving God, we pray for medical researchers as they spend hours working keenly to develop new drugs which hopefully will provide a cure for some of the serious diseases which are found throughout the world today.

Dear Heavenly Father, help us to have a discerning spirit when it comes to knowing Your plan for our lives. May we develop a strong faith which will enable us to study Your Word regularly and draw closer to You each day by way of an important prayer life.

Dear Lord, give us the courage and faith to trust in Your perfect plan. When we are worried or weary, give us strength for today and hope for tomorrow. May we be ever mindful of Your healing power, Your infinite love and Your eternal salvation.

Peter Woods



Belmont Uniting Evening Fellowship

Advance Notices - 7:30pm Wednesday 28th April



Guest Speaker - Ian Henricus
"Cycling in France" (All Welcome)

Blume's Fashion Show

Wednesday 12th May

10:00am Morning Tea

10:30am Fashion Show

\$7.00 entry & Door Prizes



Presbytery Pastoral Care Seminars

16 Apr - Friday 9:30am-12:30pm

22 Apr - Thursday 6:30pm - 9:30pm

Speak with Ikani for details



Lectionary Readings

April 11 - Easter 2

Acts 4: 13 - 32: 35

Psalms 133

1 Jn 1: 1 - 2:2

Jn 20: 19 - 31

April 18 - Easter 3

Acts 3: 12 - 19

Psalms 4

1 Jn 3: 1 - 7

Lk 24: 36b - 48

April 25 - Easter 4

Acts 4: 5 - 12

Psalms 23

1 Jn 3: 16 - 24

Jn 10: 11 - 18

May 2 - Easter 5

Acts 8: 26 - 40

Psalms 22: 25 - 31

1 Jn 4: 7 - 12

Jn 15: 1 - 8

I treasure my copy of "The Early Story of the Wesleyan Methodist Church in Victoria" "A Jubilee Volume", reviewed on the "March 7 Newsletter".

This has come down through my family. On page 17 it mentions Mr Charles Stone (who came in September, 1838). Mr Charles Stone was my great grand father who arrived with his family in Hobart Town on April 5, 1834. The family attended the Hobart Wesleyan Church which was very evangelistic and enthusiastic. At one service, Charles later wrote, "On the 4th March 1837 I found peace through believing in Jesus, my Saviour". "I made my first attempt to preach at Roseneath in June 1838". This effort was well received and the young man was encouraged to go on with his open witness for the Lord.

Charles Stone and another member of the family boarded the "Schooner, Blossom" in Hobart and sailed to Port Phillip. As there was no resident Wesleyan Minister at Port Phillip settlement, the Rev Joseph Orton, first Wesleyan Chairman of Van Diemens Land district, who had made several visits to Port Phillip, Commissioned Charles to preach on behalf of the Wesleyans and to exercise his gifts by feeding the little flock on those shores. Charles took his commission seriously and immediately used every opportunity to witness in personal conversation in tents and at work and in open air services.

Charles Stone lived briefly at Collingwood and sawed timber and built homes for a living. He was soon found preaching in the open air on the banks of the Merri Creek, the Plenty River and close by where Princes Bridge stands over the Yarra River. By 1841 he had moved to Williamstown where he lived in the new Wesleyan Church building and preached and commenced a day school - before State Schools existed. From Williamstown he covered the whole of the growing settlement witnessing and preaching. He walked as far as Brighton where he regularly conducted worship, prayer and Class Meetings in the slab home of George Thomas, an early settler. (Another great grandfather.)

George Thomas soon gave land in Union Street, Brighton, for a thatched roof Chapel. In 1845 Charles Stone and family moved to Brighton and he started another Wesleyan day school. From Brighton Charles sought out new settlement areas with aim of commencing new preaching places. This took him to Oakleigh, Berwick, Hastings, Clyde etc. He ploughed a furrow from Brighton to Oakleigh so that other lay preachers could find their way through the dense scrub.

When the Brighton cause was well established Charles Stone gave portion of his own land to extend the Hawthorn Road Church property for the present Uniting Church. (Now sold.) The foundation stone and a stained glass window in this building honour his service. Charles also helped to organise a vigorous Temperance Society whose principles are still supported today by his descendents.

Charles father in law, Captain Peter Hurlstone, who sailed the first steam boat (Firefly) up the Yarra River from Williamstown to Melbourne from 1838 was also deeply involved in the Church. When the new pipe organ for Wesley Church, Melbourne, arrived from England in 1842 no one knew how to assemble it. Peter Hurlstone was called in to put it together. That organ, now enlarged and modernised is, I believe, still the one in the present Wesley Church.

In addition to his commitment to the Wesleyan Church Charles Stone involved himself in many community and other causes. He presided at the first meeting of the Brighton Cemetery in 1855, was trustee and chairman of the Trust from 1862 until his death in 1898, he formed the first Horticultural Society in Brighton in 1856, was a member of the Brighton Bible Society Committee formed in 1856, was a member of the first municipal body and Town Councillor from 1861, a member of the Brighton School Board of Advice from when the Public Education System was introduced in 1872, President of the Wesleyan Local Preachers Association for a time, a representative to the Wesleyan Methodist Annual Conference, Circuit Steward on numerous occasions and he filled all the official positions that a layman could fill in the Church.

Present day descendants are active in all positions in the Church. The seeds sown have produced enduring blessing for God's kingdom.

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Who would dare speak up? Yet Thomas is not cowed into silence. He didn't understand and he wanted to! He can't follow Jesus unless he knows where and how. It's as simple as that. Straightforward Thomas we could call him, or simple Thomas, or how about refreshingly direct and realistic Thomas. Even, Thomas, the follower of the Way.

These two stories serve us well as background for the story of the appearance of the Risen One in the midst of the disciples. The Lord arrives when Thomas is out. The disciples are gathered in fear behind locked doors. Jesus appears and fills them with joy. He confers on them a mission and gives them his own Spirit to continue his saving work. Jesus makes his presence and power known to his closest friends and offers them the spirit-gift for the sake of the kingdom. At least that's what the Scriptures tell us.

But Thomas isn't present. He'd just stepped out briefly. Maybe he was doing a grocery run. Perhaps none of the others would put a toe out the door – but not so, Thomas. He ventures forth. He is either fearless or just plain foolhardy – or maybe both, which may be what we also need to be – but that's to get ahead of ourselves.

Thomas returns and they tell him they have seen the Lord -- but for Thomas, something doesn't ring true. If they have seen the Lord why are they still locked up tight in that room? If they are filled with such joy, why couldn't he read it on their faces? If they have been empowered by the Spirit of God to "complete Christ's work on earth" as we say in the Eucharistic Prayer – what are they waiting for? For Thomas to return? Surely not, or they would have been so breathless and eager that he would have seen the transformation in their eyes.

So Thomas says to them, in so many words, "I don't find you believable." Thomas – simple, loyal, loving, straightforward, down to earth, direct -- who didn't understand but wanted to, who longed to follow Jesus but who needed to know the way -- Thomas didn't doubt the Lord; he doubted the word of his friends! Thomas found it highly unlikely that the Lord was Risen because he was surrounded by a group of witnesses whom he simply did not find credible. There is an ancient saying in the Eastern Church: If you want to know if Jesus is really Risen, look around you at the faces at the Easter vigil.

The character of Thomas stands out clear before us. He made only one mistake. He missed the first coming of Jesus. But Thomas had two great virtues. He absolutely refused to say that he understood what he did not understand and when he was sure, he went the whole way. "My Lord and my God!" said he. There was no halfway house about Thomas.

