

From the Rector

17 March 2021

“How are you and Melinda settling into the Rectory and the life of the parish?” Several parishioners have asked me that question. It has been an interesting welcome because of COVID-safe protocols. Yet we both have felt welcomed and are both at the same time grieving the loss of the last parish and filled with joy as we meet and get to know the people of St. John’s. I would appreciate it that you keep those points in your prayers as you pray for Melinda and myself.

How blest are we as the people, the body of Christ, meeting at St. John’s! Many hardworking people, so many talented people and so many faithful people are caring for one another. At my first Evensong last Sunday, I was very impressed with the music and the singing. We all know how talented Dr. Brett McKern is in playing the organ and as a cantor. Add to this the beautiful voice of Nicola Chau. Nicola sang “The Story of the Cross”, which was very moving and a credit to her discipline in learning and becoming proficient in a cantor’s skills. One aspect that surprised me regarding the service of Evensong was it was not well attended. I know it was live-streamed, and that is good. Yet, to be in the LORD’s house, hearing the praises of the LORD through the liturgy and song is such joy. Please, do not read that I am complaining. Nor read this as a gentle rebuke. My intent is to highlight what a joyous and moving service of Evensong it was. I encourage you to place in your diaries Sunday, 11th of April, 4:00PM, Festal Choral Evensong for Eastertide.

I hope you are giving thanks to God as the COVID-19 vaccine continues to be rolled out in our society. I have met a few members who are planning to recommence attending church once they have received the vaccine. I believe that there would be a lot more in this category that I have not yet met. I appreciate and respect everyone’s decision regarding keeping safe and not placing yourself in positions where you could be more exposed to catching the COVID-19 virus. All worship services at St. John the Evangelist observe COVID-safe protocols. These protocols intend to mitigate the transmission of

the COVID-19 virus. One of the great joys is knowing (at the time of writing this update) there is no recorded transmission of COVID-19 within the general society right across New South Wales.

The government has released the latest of those eligible for the vaccine. For everyone in this category of 1B, the rollout begins on the 22nd of March. Everyone is encouraged to contact their local doctor and discuss with him/her when you may receive the COVID-vaccine.

Answered prayer, the federal government, announce when Australia would be assisting the poorer countries within our region in their fight against the COVID-19 pandemic. Vaccines are being made available to our neighbouring countries who are not financially able to vaccinate their population.

I have spoken to Bishop Michael again today. He is planning to arrive in the parish on Friday, the 19th of March. I have asked Bishop Michael to preach at both services this coming Sunday, the 21st of March, the Fifth Sunday in Lent. The parish will then enter into the period of the parish mission. This parish mission will be a good time of teaching by Bishop Michael.

The title for the parish mission is: **Encountering God in the Scriptures.**

Bishop Michael writes:

The focus will be on exploring ways of finding a way into the Bible while ensuring we remain faithful to its teaching. We will examine the Old Testament's major themes and the New Testament for an understanding of the power of the Word of God in the transformation of our lives, this parish and the world.

If you would like to host a group at your home, please contact me directly at rector@stjohnsgordon.org.au or phone me on 0401 950 724.

Last Sunday, Melinda and I were going to host a morning tea in the Rectory front garden. As you know, the heavens opened and the LORD sent the refreshing rain. We were still able to have morning tea in the Upper Room. My thanks to Jacqui and Onno and their children who served the people in a COVID-safe way. The fellowship was great and a real blessing to all who were able to be involved. As we begin to journey out of many of the COVID-safe restrictions, we will abide by our protocols to further mitigate the possibility of transmitting the COVID-19 virus as we start to embrace more opportunities for fellowship with one another. I must stress that once you have your tea/coffee, you are required at this stage to be **seated**.

As your Rector who has not seen nor experienced the “after church” time of fellowship, morning tea was tremendous and a pleasure to be involved with last Sunday. As we all know, the COVID-safe protocols concerning the NSW Health restrictions were introduced for our protection. These restrictions are slowly being repealed, allowing us to now have a COVID-safe morning tea. As the vaccinations are rolled out, we can rightly expect that the NSW Health restrictions will be repealed. I must stress we still have to observe and honour the current NSW Health restrictions until they are repealed completely.

There is a working group of Parish Council regarding the strategic framework for St. John’s. This group has been working quietly behind the scenes. I have had several meetings with the team and then some individuals. One of the tasks they have been working on is giving opportunity for more people to know me as your Rector. They are planning an interview with myself. This interview will be made available through Zoom. The date will be Wednesday, 24th of March, 7:00PM. There will be an e-mail sent out with further details early next week. If you know a parishioner who may not adapt to Zoom, why not plan to assist them by inviting them to watch with you? This group is discussing if there will be an opportunity for questions during the interview. Thank you to Stephen and your team for making this possible.

***For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD,
plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.***

(Jeremiah 29:11 NRSV)

The LORD spoke these words to Jeremiah. I do not doubt that many of us have been comforted by these words. Notice it is for your welfare, which is an excellent translation of the Hebraic text. Various translations of this text use the word “prosper” instead of “welfare”. This led to a significant distortion of the text. Unfortunately, unscrupulous people have used this distortion of the text to manipulate the people of God.

I like this text, as it firstly reminds me of the sovereignty of the LORD. I would be the first to say that the LORD does have plans for us all, and we are required to follow His direction. Naturally, with Jesus fulfilling all Scripture, our future and hope lies in the victory won by the Christ on the cross of Golgotha.

A question for you to ponder: Does this text reveal that the LORD has plans for His people, His body, His church? If the answer is “yes”, we must conclude that He has plans for the people of God who worship at St. John the Evangelist, Gordon. If the answer is “no”, we can do whatever is right in our own eyes. The LORD knows the plans He has for us at St. John the Evangelist, Gordon.

I know that the answer is “yes”. I hope you have that conclusion as well. The LORD knows the plans He has for us at St. John the Evangelist, Gordon. Those plans are for our welfare and not harm. Those plans are to give us a future with hope.

That leads to what a Rector is called to do—to shepherd the people of God to green pastures. That is, following the LORD’s direction, His plan for us, which ultimately is for our welfare as Christians.

I have been informed how Father Keith led the parish through Healthy Churches. That is excellent, and of course, there is nothing new under the Sun. The LORD is calling each of us to continue to be part of the Body of Christ. Part of the parish mission is for the building up of God’s people. Bishop Michael will be within the parish shortly to lead those who are willing to follow to further grow in our knowledge of God and, more importantly, equipping us all to continue to mature in Christ.

Have you ever pondered these words?

For surely, I know the plans I have for you, says the LORD, plans for your welfare and not for harm, to give you a future with hope.

The peace and grace of God be with you.
Father Robert H.