

MARCH
2018

Southern CROSS

THE NEWS MAGAZINE FOR SYDNEY ANGLICANS

The fallen

GOD'S MERCY IN OUR FAILURES

PLUS

God's sovereignty in change

Easter cinema

CONTENTS



COVER

Pride cometh
before a fall... then
God steps in. 10

Sydney News 3

Australian News 4

World News 5

Changes 6

Letters 7

Essay 8

Archbishop Writes 9

Cover Feature 10

Moore is More 11

Events 12

Culture 13



**“We are prayerfully seeking
a heart change that will
lead to even greater care
and compassion for the
people we serve.”**

Jenni Sawyer

Page 8

Southern CROSS MARCH 2018

volume 24 number 2



PUBLISHER: Anglican Media Sydney

PO Box W185
Parramatta Westfield 2150

PHONE: 02 8860 8860
FAX: 02 8860 8899
EMAIL: info@anglicanmedia.com.au

MANAGING EDITOR: Russell Powell

EDITOR: Judy Adamson

ART DIRECTOR: Stephen Mason

ADVERTISING MANAGER: Kylie Schleicher

PHONE: 02 8860 8850
EMAIL: ads@anglicanmedia.com.au

Acceptance of advertising does not imply endorsement. Inclusion of advertising material is at the discretion of the publisher.

SUBSCRIPTIONS: Garry Joy

PHONE: 02 8860 8861
EMAIL: subs@anglicanmedia.com.au

\$44.00 per annum (Australia)

PRINTED BY: Southern Colour



Tassie mission

Jamie and Claire Bester with their kids.

TWO ANGLICAN CHURCH PLANTS ARE IN THE WORKS FOR TASMANIA, SUPPORTED BY THE LOCAL Anglican diocese and Bush Church Aid.

Based in the semi-rural area of Brighton north of Hobart, and the Southern Beaches to the city's east, both churches are being planted in areas where Christian ministry is thin on the ground.

"Traditionally, because there hasn't been a highly functioning church locally, a lot of people – more than half of people I meet – have 'de-churched'... they say it's just not relevant to their lives," says the Rev Jamie Bester who, with his wife Claire, begins Southern Beaches Anglican Church on March 11.

The new church will be linked to St George's, Sorell, where Mr Bester served in a lay capacity in 2015-16, in addition to working as chaplain at a local school.

"We've had a prayer team of about 20 people meeting for the past 18 months," he says, "and since I got back [from college] there have been regular meetings as a launch team that have averaged around 35 people."

The Bishop of Tasmania, Dr Richard Condie, says he drove around the Southern Beaches with the national director of BCA, the Rev Dr Mark Short, and the rector of Sorell, the Rev Joel Kettleton.

They were all struck by the lack of places to worship. "We were surprised that there was only the Salvation Army left in any of the towns – and they were not at the time running Sunday services!" Bishop Condie says.

According to the latest Census the Southern Beaches is Tasmania's fastest-growing region but ministering to the area as a whole is tricky, as – in a half-hour drive from Lewisham to Dunalley – there are more than half a dozen different communities.

With the blessing of Mr Kettleton, the Besters went to one of the parish's six churches, St Martin's at Dunalley, and moved one of its fortnightly services into a hall across the road, adding a cuppa before the service and lunch afterwards to create community and build relationships. A handful of people has now grown to 40 regulars.

Once Southern Beaches Anglican begins holding services members will meet three weeks out of four at a local public school, with the fourth week at Dunalley. "Missional communities" will meet mid-week in each town for Bible study and dinner, and consider "how to be servants for Jesus in their community, how to reach people with the gospel and how to love their neighbours".



Chris and Naomi Duff with their family.

Missional communities are also in the plan of the Rev Chris Duff and his wife Naomi, whose Brighton church plant (linked to Edge Anglican at Claremont) is still in the planning stages.

"We could draw a few dozen people together and start a service but [we want to] start by giving people a solid foundation in Jesus and filling in those other blanks as we go along," Mr Duff says.

"Initially I think it's going to look like a missional community... gathering a group of people and helping them live the Christian life more fully in their day to day rather than see church as an hour on Sunday.

"As we gather the core team together it'll probably be at our place but then we hope to try and... meet fortnightly somewhere in the community for fellowship and interaction.

"On the other fortnight we'd go out on mission as a group to somewhere that needs it – down to the housing commission to have a BBQ and clean up, or having a soup kitchen, those sorts of ideas. We haven't really plugged into what the needs are yet. It will depend a bit on the dynamic of the group."

The core desire for both churches is the proclamation of the gospel and creating "disciple-making disciples". This fits in well with the diocesan vision to be "a church for Tasmania, making disciples of Jesus".

Says Bishop Condie: "I am delighted to see two new churches being planted as we know it is an effective way to make disciples. We are praying that God will grow these new ministries and abundantly bless the people of Brighton and the Southern Beaches."



“We have lost a giant”

All for Jesus: Billy Graham with then-Archbishop Marcus Loane at the 1979 crusade at Randwick Racecourse.

PHOTO: Ramon Williams

ARCHBISHOP GLENN DAVIES HAS LED TRIBUTES FROM LEADERS ACROSS SYDNEY FOR DR BILLY Graham, saying “We have lost a giant among us”.

The American evangelist died at his home in Montreat, North Carolina, surrounded by his family. He was 99.

During his decades-long ministry he preached to an estimated 215 million people in 185 countries around the world as well as millions more on television and radio, and lately online.

He was welcomed by the Queen and was dubbed “America’s pastor” as he counselled US presidents from Harry S Truman to George Bush and Barack Obama.

Dr Graham married Ruth McCue Bell after meeting her at college, and he credited her with being the greatest influence on his ministry. She died in 2007.

Under God, Dr Graham had an amazing crusade ministry in various parts of the world – including London and Los Angeles – but his landmark crusade in Sydney in 1959 was to change the face of the Sydney Diocese and Australian Christianity.

Supported by successive Archbishops of Sydney, Dr Graham returned in 1968 and in 1979 to evangelise again.

But it was in 1959 that he had his greatest influence and the crusade saw the conversion of many future leaders including Dr Peter Jensen, later Principal of Moore College and Archbishop of Sydney, his brother Phillip who had a long university ministry and the Rev Dr Bruce Ballantine-Jones, who headed the NSW Council of Churches.

The former Archbishop of Sydney gave thanks to God for the ministry of the evangelist.

“Like so many others, I came to know the Lord personally through the preaching of Mr Graham,” Dr Jensen said. “He came to Australia at just the right moment in our history. He united the churches and he preached Christ from the Bible. Throughout his life, that is what he did, never missing the chance to talk winsomely about Jesus.

“I thank God for the wonderful gift of this extraordinary man.”

Dr Graham was also a driving force behind the Lausanne Movement, which grew out of the 1974 International Congress on World Evangelisation he convened in Lausanne, Switzerland.

“The world has lost one of the most significant figures of the late 20th century,” Archbishop Glenn Davies said after hearing the news of Dr Graham’s death. “Billy Graham’s extensive ministry has affected the lives of millions of people around the globe and, under God, hundreds of thousands of people have been brought to faith in Jesus Christ through his anointed preaching ministry.”

The Archbishop also noted his influence on this country.

“We in Australia are especially grateful for his first visit to our country in 1959, where his crusade in Sydney of that year had all the hallmarks of revival with increased church attendance, increased candidates offering themselves for the ministry and a marked effect on criminal statistics with fewer crimes being committed.

“His return in 1968 and 1979 was again welcomed by church leaders, and again saw an increased level of co-operation among the churches and many people becoming Christians.

“Billy Graham was passionate about Jesus Christ and unrelenting in finding ways to persuade people to put their trust in the Saviour of the world. We have lost a giant among us – but the angels in heaven rejoice in his arrival in his eternal home.”

Fundraising for third GAFCON



Hands across the water: delegates celebrate the Jerusalem Declaration at GAFCON 2008. PHOTO: Joy Gwaltney

WITH PREPARATIONS WELL UNDER WAY FOR THE THIRD GLOBAL ANGLICAN FUTURE CONFERENCE (GAFCON), there has been an appeal for churches and individuals to sponsor delegates from poorer areas.

The first conference was held in Jerusalem in 2008 and was a landmark in mobilising church leaders and laity to resist the undermining of biblical foundations in the Anglican Communion. The “Jerusalem Declaration”, passed by the conference, called on participants to “give clear and certain witness to Jesus Christ”.

As well as the establishment of a Primates Council representing more than half of the world’s Anglicans, the conference organisers started a movement. Since 2008, a leaders’ meeting was held in London in 2012 and the second GAFCON in Nairobi in 2013. GAFCON’s general secretary, Dr Peter Jensen, says the conference returns to Jerusalem in June this year.

Unlike the Lambeth Conference, which is attended only by bishops, GAFCON delegates can be bishops, clergy or lay people.

The Archbishop of Sydney’s Anglican Aid has opened the GAFCON18 Bursary Fund to help delegates attend from across the Anglican Communion – people who would simply not have the funds to take part otherwise.

“The 2008 conference was a totally new initiative,” Dr Jensen says. “It looked forward – it is a ‘future’ conference. The Communion of old had changed irrevocably with events in North America, which denied both the clear teaching of the word of God and also the value of Christian unity and fellowship.

“The Future Conference did not abandon the Communion: it looked to the future and saw what the Communion would have to become if it is to survive.

“Second, the location. It was no accident that we were summoned to Jerusalem. Here was the scene of the Saviour’s death and resurrection. In Jerusalem, the Spirit came on the day of Pentecost and the gospel was first preached.

“If we were looking and hoping for renewal and courage, symbolically there could be no better place than this. It took us back to our true roots.”

Dr Jensen pointed out that the decision at the 2013 Nairobi conference to set up a missionary society in England has resulted in the planting of 14 churches and the appointment of a missionary bishop. Hopes are high for 2018.

“Our urgent need is for the Bible to be restored to the heart of our life together so that our Anglican identity can be shaped and ordered by God’s word,” the chairman of GAFCON and Primate of Nigeria, Archbishop Nicholas Okoh, said in a statement last month.

“There is much in our shared history that we can thank God for, but that alone will not hold us together in the present. In a globalised world, GAFCON’s vision is to see the full potential of our Communion realised as faithful Anglicans from every nation, race and culture unite in a clear, confident and joyful witness to Jesus Christ, who makes all things new.”

Anglican Aid’s Bursary Fund appeal is at anglicanaid.org.au/GAFCON18



MELBOURNE IN THE BLUE MOUNTAINS

After spending seven of the past nine years in the Western Sydney parish of Emu Plains, the **Rev Tom Melbourne** took up the rectorship of Lawson last month.

"I was assistant minister at Emu Plains for the past four years, but Alison and I moved there after we first got married in 2009, when I was doing MTS," he says.

"We also had our first two years at college at Emu Plains so it was definitely hard to leave! But we had reached the point where we realised that we'd achieved so much of what we wanted to achieve, so things like the youth ministry were ready to be put into somebody else's hands.

"We were thinking, 'There are churches out there that would really love to have someone young to come and take the reins' so we put our hands up and then [Western Sydney Bishop] Ivan Lee said, 'Let's talk about Lawson.'"

Mr Melbourne says that both he and Alison felt a real connection with the people at Lawson as they got to know each other.

"We thought, 'Here's a church that we can click in with'. It was pretty obvious from the get-go that these were people who were super keen to reach their area with the gospel of Jesus, that they were ready to try new things and that excited us!

"The welcome we've received has shown that's certainly the case, we've felt very loved and cared for and lots of people are asking us when or how can they get involved."

Church members are already teaching SRE in local schools, and the Melbournes are starting up a Sunday school with their own kids and another couple of children in the congregation, knowing that if something is available for kids that others will come.

"We really want to engage our community in any way we can," Mr Melbourne says. "The church is ready to do whatever needs to be done, which is lovely. They want to reach young families and Lawson is definitely becoming a more popular place for families to settle.

"I'm optimistic that as the gospel is preached, as people are loved, as the church is showing its welcoming side, that people will settle and together with the churches around us we can reach this area with the truth of Jesus."

BRUSH WITH BCA



parish whose members are pulling together for the kingdom.

"People were so encouraging about my preaching and leadership," he says. "And after my last service... one lady grabbed [my wife] Michelle and said, 'I was away from the Lord for 48 years and I came here and he found me again'. That was huge."

At BCA Mr Brush's role is to call the church to mission in rural Australia. This includes enlarging and encouraging the supporter base, recruiting and caring for field workers, and "supporting churches in the bush in whatever way I can – training, coaching, whatever", in five of the state's seven dioceses.

"Michelle and I both grew up in the bush," he says. "I've always had a heart for ministry in the bush but never had much of a chance to pursue it, so I'm really excited. It'll be a very different ministry but BCA has lots of good things happening."

Former rector of the parish of Lower Mountains, the **Rev Ted Brush**, has become Bush Church Aid's regional officer for NSW and ACT.

"It was pretty hard to leave, but then it's always hard to leave," he says. "As senior minister we lose hundreds of relationships with those who would call one of our centres their 'home'... but the parish has a purpose, people are united around a mission to make disciples and it's growing.

"I left on a high, there's no question about that! In God's grace I was the right person at the right time... The growth came in spits and spurts but it's still growing, which is great."

The parish has three centres: Glenbrook, Blaxland and Mount Riverview. After the Brush family arrived at the start of 2010, the Glenbrook congregation began to grow. It wasn't long before it moved to Blaxland High School, where it kept growing – "by the end of 2011 we'd grown too big to come back!"

It was clear the time had come to redevelop the main Glenbrook site. Plans were made, funds were raised, and the bulk of 2013 was spent in rebuilding. Members moved back in late in that year – including the Blaxland High congregation, and while Mr Brush will miss both people and place, he was thrilled to leave a healthy, growing

DOUGAL TO DURAL

The **Rev Dougal Michie** has moved from his role as associate minister at North Epping to become rector of Dural District.

"When we arrived at All Saints' my youngest was two and my eldest had only just started school, so All Saints' is the only church they can really remember," Mr Michie says. "We formed many close friendships at All Saints' and I was part of a fantastic ministry team. Already we miss them and feel the distance. But that separation is coupled with the excitement of starting new relationships at Dural.

"We talked with our kids from time to time about moving. So we feel like we prepared them as well as we could. But for a long time we didn't know where that move might take us. Like many families in our position, the reality for the kids has been a new house, new school, new church, new friendships and so on. But God has answered our prayers and so far they're settling in really well."

Mr Michie says he and his wife Rachel had been talking for two years about what they might do next, exploring ministry opportunities both inside and outside Sydney.

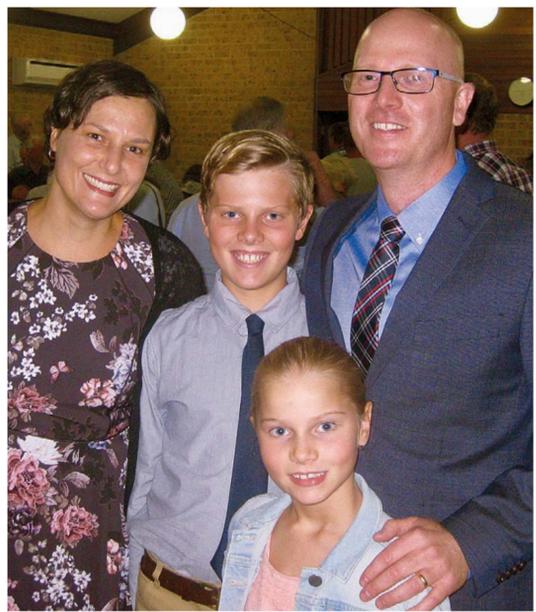
"After meeting the Dural nominators, we both had a sense that this was a place where we would like to come," he says. "We were immediately excited about the possibility.

"As they described the parish, Rachel and I felt we had gifts we could offer – and that this was a parish where our gifts would be welcomed and encouraged."

Mr Michie says the parish has "a terrific ministry team" and he is looking forward to "getting on with the job of serving Jesus together with them".

"My overwhelming impression is that people are excited about the future of the parish and there's genuine willingness to back new ministry initiatives," he says.

"The commissioning service was a brilliant event and an opportunity for people to look forward with a real sense of positivity."



POSITIVE PARENTING

I was so impressed with the article on caring for new parents (SC, February). I just wanted to go back and start again!

My eldest is 55 with three others below to 40, and there was very little when they were born to help care for mothers. It was all about baby! If anything was wrong it was the mother's fault.

If a baby or toddler was restless in church, one got stony stares and suggestions that one should go outside. And there were many similar situations with church. Only because I wanted to worship the Lord did I persist in attending regardless of the "grumpies".

I was an only child and my parents didn't have friends with babies, so I found out about babies when I had my first. My in-laws giggled at my ineptness and thought I would have been better off learning house skills than playing the piano. But all that is as it may be.

Just having a supportive and loving community within the church is vital to a new mother's mental as well as physical health. To have other mothers as well as professionals to share one's joys and sorrows and to pray with would have been amazing when I was a young mum.

My daughter, a midwife with four children of her own, would support all your article says – and all my children would agree that it would have been helpful for them if their mother had had better support. They have some stories to tell!

I was also encouraged to read about the father who has taken parental leave to care for his son. How wonderful to think that this young boy will grow up with a good, balanced view of parenting. Not just mother and a person she calls "Dad" who comes home at night tired and leaves early in the morning.

Luise Cottis
Bowral

JESUS' AMBASSADORS

Thank you Kel Richards for your encouragement in the December edition about the urgency of our need to share the gospel.

Yes! We are *all* called to be Christ's ambassadors. We need to, and must, take every opportunity as we wait for our Lord's return (2 Peter 3, 2 Cor 5:11-21).

If we have been forgiven and are in a right relationship with our heavenly Father because of and through Jesus' atoning death and triumphant resurrection, and have been born again, do we really have to be "trained", "equipped", "motivated" and "inspired" to tell others of what he has done for us – and therefore can do for them?

The training, equipping, motivation and inspiration are not things that can be taught but are obvious manifestations of the Holy Spirit in a believer's life.

Take a look at the woman at the well (John 4:25-42), or consider Ephesians 2:1-10, Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16 and Luke 24: 44-49. We must be heavenly minded to be of any earthly use!

Kris Proskefalas
Koolewong





A thousand years of ministry

DAVID MULREADY

IN FEBRUARY 1968, 33 YOUNG MEN AGED FROM THEIR LATE TEENS TO THEIR THIRTIES COMMENCED studies at Moore College to further prepare for a lifetime of serving the Lord Jesus Christ – including one student each from Vietnam, Tanzania and the UK. Four more were added to our number in 1969. Most of us were single.

Following college, 17 were ordained as Anglican ministers, one as a Presbyterian and one as a Methodist. The remainder served Christ within their chosen professions, from teaching to building, and stockbroking to the arts.

On February 6, 18 of our number gathered at the college as guests of the principal for a 50th anniversary reunion. We were all excited – while some of us have been close friends ever since we graduated, I hadn't seen some of these people for 47 years! We were overwhelmed with the welcome we received from the college and were treated like royalty.



A lifetime of serving Christ: (top) the 1968 intake at Moore College, and (above) last month's reunion.

We began our day with a chapel service at which Bishop Paul Barnett, a former teacher of ours, preached on Romans 8. Later, we had lunch with current students and staff, toured the (much bigger!) college with the vice-principal and had plenty of time to catch up.

It was fascinating to learn how our great God has used us, with the active participation of our wives, in secular employment, school chaplaincy, parish ministry and on various boards, councils and committees; plus writing and lecturing in (and even leading) several theological colleges.

Some have served with CMS, BCA, African Enterprise, Crusaders, Anglicare, AFES, SU, CEBS, Camp Howard, WYAM, the Bible Society, the defence forces and other Christian organisations. How much variety there has been as God has directed and guided us in the work he prepared for us.

Most of those who were ordained have served in dioceses across the length and breadth of the country – from North West Australia to Tasmania. Many have served the Lord overseas, in locations as diverse as India, Kenya, Vanuatu, Indonesia, Vietnam and North America. Four have gone to be with the Lord, including the Rev Canon Boak Jobbins.

Half our year was not ordained and they've had wonderful, fruitful lay ministries, no less important than the work of those of us made "Rev". Sadly, sometimes it comes across that the most important ministry is ordained ministry, and that shouldn't be so. Just because these men weren't ordained doesn't mean they were having a lesser influence for Christ!

During a service of the Lord's Supper we gave thanks to God for the privilege of having spent those formative years together at college. There was joy in being together, joy in recalling times and events past, and rejoicing in the ministries we have undertaken with the Lord's help. As we talked, it was recalled that our principal, Dr Broughton Knox, observed that, "Your year is the happiest year to go through the college in my time".

We did, after all, have a lot of fun at Moore College. I was only 19 and I wasn't the youngest, so while there was obviously the serious side of study and learning, at the same time some of us were still growing up and there was quite a bit of frolicking and antics. I guess Broughton cottoned on to the fact that there was fun and enjoyment – I also think people are working a lot harder now than we used to!

There have been many hardships and blessings throughout our years of ministry. It will ever be so – and those at college now will discover the same truths we did once they graduate. Whatever the road, we (and they) will continue, as jars of clay, to serve God wherever he leads us, for his glory.

Some memorable comments from our time of sharing are worth quoting:

- *My calling/vocation has been as a Christian in the market place.*
- *The highlights of my life tend to be the low lights in which God has proved himself faithful. We are awestruck by the breadth and nature of God's many blessings to us.*
- *Overall I have much to regret, but also much still to do and much to be thankful for.*
- *I love teaching people the word of God and I enjoy seeing people grow in faith.*
- *It becomes more obvious with every passing year that there is nothing as good as being loved by our great God and Saviour.*
- *Parish ministry was at times stressful and I came undone more than once.*
- *It's been a wonderful journey, stuff-ups and all. Thankfully grace is all.*

We are so thankful to God for our dedicated, humble, godly and Bible-based teaching staff all those years ago. We were thrilled that some of them were able to join us – Bishop Tony Nichols (from Perth), the Rev Dr Graeme Goldsworthy (from Brisbane), the Rev Dr John McIntosh as well as Bishop Barnett. How encouraging it is that these four giants continue to write, lecture and give the lead to the generations that follow.

Now aged in our seventies and eighties we are still eager to live for Christ and to continue serving him. We thank God for the privilege of spending more than a thousand years in ministry over the past 50 years – and, God willing, we've got many more hundreds between us!

Commune with Christ

DR GLENN DAVIES



LENT IS OFTEN SEEN AS A TIME OF SELF-DISCIPLINE AND SELF-DENIAL. FOUNDED upon the experience of Jesus' fasting in the wilderness for 40 days, Christians from early times have sought to replicate that experience in the 40 days of Lent.

Of course, such replication is impossible unless one truly fasts for this period of time, for merely giving up chocolate, coffee or wine for Lent is not quite up to the standard of Jesus' fasting!

However, perhaps our ecclesiastical forebears were aware of the strictures of fasting for 40 days in a row, so they modified this experience by declaring the Sundays in Lent as feast days, rather than fast days. Thus if you look at your calendar and count the days from Ash Wednesday (which fell on February 14 this year) to Easter Day (April 1) you'll see that there are in fact 46 days, since the six Sundays of Lent are not included in the "40 days of fasting".

Moreover, to prepare for the rigours of Lent, Shrove Tuesday, the day before Ash Wednesday, was observed as a day of rich feasting, hence it is popularly known as Mardi Gras (literally "Fat Tuesday") or "Pancake Tuesday" – a day for splurging before the abstemious discipline of Lent commenced.

While many Protestants rarely refrain from denying themselves certain foods in Lent – though some may abstain from meat on Good Friday – they have no difficulty in celebrating Shrove Tuesday with pancakes! That was certainly my own family's experience though my mother, who loved chicken, would regularly serve it on Good Friday, vehemently declaring that chicken was not really meat!

On the other hand, the Roman Catholic Church continues to require its adherents to abstain from meat, not just in Lent, but on all Fridays of the year, as a form of penance.

The stated reason for Catholics not being allowed to eat meat on Fridays is to remind the faithful that Jesus died on a Friday. As Jesus gave up his body (his flesh) upon the cross, it was thought that, in an effort to attain greater communion with Christ, refraining from consuming meat (flesh) would achieve this.

Curiously, this form of logic suggests that communion with Christ, described metaphorically in John 6 as "eating his flesh" and "drinking his blood", would be better achieved by not eating flesh.

For Protestants, true communion with Christ is found in abiding in Christ, meditating on his word, consuming it and imbibing it. As Ezekiel ate the scroll of God's word, which tasted as sweet as honey, so he was empowered and equipped to prophesy God's words to Israel (Ezekiel 3:3; cf Revelation 10:10-11).

Rather than abstinence, eating and drinking in the presence of God is a celebration of his mercy and grace. As Moses and Aaron, together with the 70 elders, went up to meet God on Mount Sinai, "they ate and drank and beheld God" (Exodus 24:11).

It is therefore not surprising that a meal was chosen by God as the memorial of his covenant with his people, of their redemption from the bondage of Egypt, known as the Passover meal.

Moreover, it was in the context of this meal that our Lord chose to give his disciples a sign and seal of his presence in the celebration of the new covenant through the Lord's Supper. The words, "This is my body" and "This is my blood" reflect the need to commune with Christ – to consume him and to imbibe him – by eating his flesh and drinking his blood, as he had taught them in the words recorded in John 6. For Jesus' words in John 6 are not teaching about the Lord's Supper; rather, the Lord's Supper is teaching us in the language of John 6 what it means to "eat his flesh" and "drink his blood".

While the New Testament speaks of times when Christians fasted and prayed, this was normally upon special occasions that required clear direction from God for a contemplated course of action (Acts 13:3-4; 14:23).

There is no doubt a place for such fasting exists today (Matthew 6:16-18) and it is regularly coupled with prayer. However, it should not be a perfunctory exercise. While its link to Lent may reflect the practice of Christians through the ages, it has no scriptural warrant and is therefore not obligatory, though it may still be useful.

Yet if you want to draw closer to God, consume his word – it is sweeter than honey and will revive your soul (Psalm 19:7, 10). Let Lent be a time for further prayerful reflection upon God's word, through personal reading, joining a Bible study (if not already a regular member) and making sure your attendance at church is weekly (if that is not your practice).

Lent leads us to Easter, but we are already risen with Christ in the heavenly places (Ephesians 2:4). **SC**

A PRAYER FOR MISSION 2020

Our heavenly Father, fill our lives with the fruit of your Spirit, so that we may walk in joyful obedience, share your love by word and deed, and see Christ honoured in every community as Lord and Saviour.

Amen

Failure and restoration

We can all fall, and fall away, but do we really believe it? And do we know how to keep ourselves travelling God's way, asks **SCOTT MONK**.

THE TWO MEN WALKED ONTO THE CHURCH STAGE WITHOUT KILLING EACH OTHER.

That was a miracle.

Seven years previously, they'd been best mates. Then one day, the first man – a father of four – found out that the second man had committed adultery with his wife. Divorce followed in what the first man described as a double betrayal.

"It was like a death to me," the first man said, in front of the shocked and silent congregation at MBM Rooty Hill. "I would've liked someone to have shot me in the head to be honest, because the pain was really unbearable."

Anger, pain, revenge, bitterness... any one of these could've overpowered the first man, especially each night as he returned home to an empty house echoing with the reminder of the destruction brought upon his life. But instead of spiralling into despair, he was reminded of his own sinful past and how he'd found mercy at the foot of the cross of Christ. Remarkably, he prayed to Jesus for help in forgiving the second man as he didn't have the strength to do so on his own.

As the years passed, the Lord answered his prayer. The second man became convicted of his wickedness and wrote a confession to the first man, asking for his forgiveness. The first man forgave. That was grace – a hard, difficult grace that continually needed to be scooped from the deepest, most difficult of wells, but grace nonetheless.

Sitting next to him on that stage the second man wept as he carried out one of the hardest acts of his life: publicly saying sorry to his friend, his former wife, his son, their wider families, the church and, most importantly, Jesus.

"I brought shame and pain to a lot of people and I caused a lot of hurt to a lot of people within MBM and it's something that I can't change," the second man said.

But in being forgiven by the first man, the second man had been shown "that Jesus is actually real" – that the worst of sins can be forgiven.

Giving an insight into the mind of a Christian who has fallen, the second man told the congregation: "One of the biggest things is self-respect. You lose that respect that you have for yourself. You think: 'I did that?' And when you do that, the Evil One comes along and starts to play games and says, 'You're not forgiven. God won't do that.' But as time goes on and as relationships grow, it's just continuously shown me that Jesus wins every time."

Slowly, bit by bit, the friendship between the two men was rebuilt, but then tragedy struck again: the first man was diagnosed with bone cancer. Who was the person who sat beside him, taking time off work to sit and read the Bible? The second man. That was Christ-like.

Their testimony should be required viewing at all Sydney churches. It's one of the strongest warnings about the devastation of sin as well as one of the most powerful messages about restoration.

YOU CAN FALL

No Christian is safe from falling. Yet no Christian is beyond God's mercy.

Unfortunately, too many Christians believe they will never fall, yet every year our churches are scandalised by young and older believers alike walking away from Christ to chase what evangelical pastor Chuck Swindoll narrows down to the four worldly pursuits of fortune, fame, power and pleasure.

The Rev Jim Ramsay, who has worked in ministry spanning 47 years as head pastor at Bexley North, Liverpool and Engadine Anglican churches, and now works part-time with the Fellowship of Independent Evangelical Churches, says all Christians can be enticed away from the Lord, including leaders.

"I have seen people fall away – people very, very close to us," Ramsay says. "I know of over 45, almost 50 clergy who have been unfaithful to their wives. Some of those men have walked right away from God. Some of those have hardened their hearts. Some of those have repented and, by God's grace, are pressing on well."

The 75-year-old quotes 1 Cor 10:12 (ESV):

Therefore let anyone who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall.

"The Bible's worried about it, so therefore we should be," Ramsay says. "Everywhere I've been, I've seen people fall and I'm aware it could be me."

A driving force that leads to a fall is believing the lies that sin promises, he says.

"The mindset seems to be: the thing that I need, the thing that I would like to experience, the burden that I don't want to carry, the difficulty that I have to undertake is just too hard and my need right now is to be comfortable and to be happy as much as I can. And to be, in the nicest possible way, self-serving. And you know what? That starts off being nice. It's pleasant.

"I left school when I was 15. I was an apprentice in a factory and somebody said to me: 'Good Aussie rule: look after number one'. And it's a brilliant rule. I loved it. The problem was you keep on meeting other people who are living by the same rule.

"But theologically we're talking about the deceitfulness of sin. And the only power that the devil has over us is if we believe his lies. He's powerless otherwise."

Despite common perceptions, Christians normally don't fall away because of one giant mistake that suddenly happens.

"Jesus has begun to fade to black – little bit by little bit," Ramsay says. "I'm not aware of any guy who goes to bed happy one night and wakes up the following morning, saying: 'Today, I'm going to be unfaithful to my wife and sleep with X'. It doesn't happen that way. It's sort of like a courtship and a seduction but on the wrong side of the tracks."

The lure of worldliness is far more deceptive and likely to occur over a longer period, says Sarah Condie, a co-director of the Mental Health and Pastoral Care Institute with Anglican Deaconess Ministries, as well as a women's pastor at Church by the Bridge, Kirribilli.

"When you're thinking about sin, it's the subtle things that pull you away from God that you don't even realise are sins," Condie says. "You might not actually realise that you're being pulled."

One such subtle pull is disappointment – normally stemming from common everyday anxieties such as grief, illness, loneliness, hopelessness or marital dissatisfaction.

"For example, you're single and you want to be married, and that's a deep longing," she says. "Or you long to have children and that doesn't happen. So do you fall away? How do you keep going?"

Another subtle pull is busyness, says Steve Kryger, the chairman of Katoomba Easter Convention and BASECAMP.

"Every pastor I've met with says the issue of busyness is the biggest factor in their churches for people not growing and participating," he says.

Kryger regularly meets with laity and leaders across all denominations as part of his job. "People are too busy for relationships," he says. "And when you're busy, you're lonely and you're tired, you then start spiralling into other activities that take you away from trusting God."

SPIRITUALLY DRY

Another warning sign a person's faith is being pulled in the wrong direction is spiritual dryness.

Condie knows about this intimately. For 10 slow years, she felt dry slipping through her fingers like hot sand. The parched feeling of prayers in her mouth, the dry cracks in her trust in God. The sapping of energy while trudging along a claypan of uncertainty.

"Reflecting on my life, I became a Christian when I was 16 – that was an amazing experience," she says.

"My father died when I was 22 and no one knew how to do grief back in those days and I felt quite isolated. I didn't feel isolated from God but it was a hard time. I don't think I understood the impact grief has in wearing you down."

At the same time, her husband Keith went to Moore College and she had to put his needs before her own. She worked so he could study and she began to feel like her husband's faith and ministry were more important to God. This led to a few years of spiritual dryness.

"I felt a bit like the older brother in the prodigal son [Luke 15:11-32]," she says. "I felt like I was the one who was asking those questions of God, like, 'This is not fair', without realising I was asking those questions deeply of myself."

"I didn't understand what I was asking. I think I lost my sense of identity with God."

During a second drought, Condie had to battle a serious illness that forced her to step down from her full-time job; all this at the time her oldest son was doing his HSC.

The cool, refreshing waters of grace bubbled within her soul once again when she was reminded that God loved her and she was his precious, beloved child. It was almost like becoming a Christian all over again.

In doing this, she rediscovered her identity in Christ. God used his word to speak to her profoundly, personally and deeply. Over time, Condie has learnt the value of five basic principles that she now shares with other Christians who are backsliding or struggling to trust God.

RECONNECTION

First, and possibly one of the least talked about principles for restoration, is fellowship. Simply, Christians need to reconnect, she says. They need to reject the individualistic way of doing life and seek help from their brothers and sisters in Christ.

"God has wired us to be relational," Condie says. "God gives us each other to walk with each other, to enable us not to fall.

"A lot of psychologists and specialists would say the best thing you can do to help your mental health is to connect with others. In connecting, you can wrestle with those questions and have other people's voices speaking into that and say: 'Let's do this together. Let's pray together. Let's read God's word together.' That helps you do the Christian life better."

Ramsay and Ramsay wholeheartedly agree.

Kryger cites Hebrews 3:13's call to encourage one another as a defence against sin's deceitfulness. "We've allowed ourselves to be isolates – to live in silos," he says.

"People say 'I love my family church'. They kind of love their family church but what they want is a rest home or a cruise ship. There's got to be that deeper thing of sensibly and intelligently loving people in a strong way and an intentional way."

Kryger is surprised how isolated most pastors have become in modern society.

"They may have relationships with people in their church but most of them aren't that well connected with people they went to college with or many other friendships outside of church," he says. "There seems to be this big issue with pastors not having those connections."

Kryger points to remarks made last year to *The Washington Post* by former US surgeon-general Vivek H. Murthy about how dangerous the epidemic of loneliness has become. "When you look at the data, what's really interesting is loneliness has been found to be associated with a reduction of life span," Murthy said. "The reduction in life span [for loneliness] is similar to that caused by smoking 15 cigarettes a day, and it's greater than the impact on life span of obesity."

At a church level, the danger is more than just smoking. Says Kryger: "That's a massive precursor to all the other things that are going on – the triggers that call us to sin because we have no deep relationships".

Churches need to actively build those relationships and create safe places where people can be open, honest and accountable to each other about their failings, he says.

"Randy Pope at Perimeter Church in Atlanta has a really radical structure for how discipleship works." Kryger adds. "You sign up for a small group in a male-only group or a female-only group, and his rationale is that men don't share with women what they would share with men, and vice-versa. You have to commit to each other and you have to justify to the group."

"He's seen heaps of growth through that – just providing men and women with a forum to actually talk deeply about what is going on in their lives. We're separated from quality relationships and even in church we don't really have many forums where you can open up [with] eight people sitting around the table on a Thursday night to say, 'You know what, I can't stop looking at pornography.'"

Kryger recently tested this by sending out a Facebook message to only the men in his church, gauging interest for a steak night at the local pub. "Sixteen guys turned up. Now we'd never got guys turning up to anything before. There's a hunger for relationship and to start talking about things together."

CAUGHT LIKE A BEAR

"Ever seen a bear? How they're big and strong and powerful? Well, that was me as a Christian. But then I stepped in a bear trap."

In the midnight hours in his suburban Sydney home, single man Gavin (not his real name) sat with the curtains drawn, the lights off and his face glowing with electronic light as he scrolled online through hundreds of pornographic images. One mouse click became one more, then 10 more, then 50 more. The bear trap's teeth had caught him.

"I never thought I'd get caught up in porn," he says. "Some of my mates said they were but stupidly I thought I was stronger than them."

"But then one night this girl that I liked gave me the cold shoulder, and I came home and I wanted something to pick me up. That's when it started. I saw a couple of images, then I wanted more."

"I hate myself for doing it. I've never felt so guilty in my life. I was worried that God would never forgive me. I never wanted to do that again but sure enough, six months later..."

Gavin's addiction wasn't daily or weekly. He'd binge for a few hours once or twice a year. The turning point came when he admitted his addiction to an older Christian man. "It was horrible and embarrassing. Who wants to admit that kind of stuff?"

But he realised he needed to change as he was not only committing adultery with the women he saw in those images (Matt 5:28) but also letting Christ down. In addition, he discovered that his addiction really stemmed from a fear of being single for the rest of his life.

Gavin now has filters on all his electronic devices, "bounces" his eyes when he sees sexually explicit billboards and chooses sport shows over drama as many TV shows increasingly incorporate nudity. He also prays.

"There's so much sexual content in the world now," he says. "It's the worst it's ever been. Jesus wouldn't like it and that means I have to hate it, too. If anyone isn't fighting it, then they'll get caught in it, too."

"You've got to love Jesus more than your sinfulness. If you don't then it's only going to get worse in the long run."

COMBAT THE PORN PANDEMIC

Churches are in the grip of a pornography pandemic and it's one of the biggest immediate issues confronting both men and women.

A few years ago Steve Kryger was left stunned after he asked a large church's leadership group what it was doing to combat the scourge. "We don't talk about it. We don't want to put ideas into men's heads," was the answer.

"It's still stuck with me that we're not talking about one of the greatest challenges that men are facing and causing them to walk away from the Lord," he says. "I spoke to a counsellor last year who was sharing some stories at one of the conferences we ran and I asked her about the effect of pornography... she said it's a presenting cause in just about every marriage counselling session she has."

With input from a group of Christian men, Steve Kryger lists 14 ways for men and women to combat pornography on his blog www.communicatejesus.com:

- **Know God:** Not as a theological or intellectual exercise but as call to obedience.
- **Memorise Scripture:** Jesus fought Satan's temptation with God's Word. Good passages include: Matt 5:8, Ps 119:35-37, Mark 7:20-23, 1 Cor 10:23 and Heb 12:1-2.
- **Enjoy Jesus more:** As one man said, "If you are not finding satisfaction in the Lord then you will not be satisfied with anything else, whether that is your wife or your singleness."
- **Pray each morning**
- **Reflect on the beauty of your spouse**
- **Acknowledge that you live in a pornographic culture**
- **Read a book:** That suggestions include *Sexual Detox* (Tim Challies), *The Pursuit of Holiness* (Jerry Bridges), *Finally Free* (Heath Lambert) and *Overcoming Sin and Temptation* (John Owen).
- **Join a 12-step program** such as Sexaholics Anonymous or an X3 Group.
- **Go "behind the curtain":** Research the impacts of pornography on yourself, society and those involved.
- **Know your triggers:** Are you triggered by boredom, frustration, hurt or loneliness? It helps confront the real issue leading to temptation.
- **Flee:** Based on 1 Cor 6:18.
- **Get an accountability partner:** Bring in friends of the same gender to aid you in the fight.
- **Get accountability software:** Accountable2You, Covenant Eyes, Ever Accountable.
- **Don't trust yourself:** We are in a constant spiritual battle. Temptation is constant. Avoid being alone with a member of the opposite sex in a private setting.

THE LIES

Condie's second important principle for restoration is that hurting people need to disentangle themselves from the lies of the world. This ranges from turning off social media that presents everyone as living wonderful, picture-perfect lives to accepting the hard truth that Christians don't get a free pass from suffering.

"The secular world teaches us that we can have whatever we want, we can do whatever we want, and it's all about me and being fantastic," Condie says.

"That's not the Christian framework but a lot of Christians still have that very individualistic secular view – I want to do this, I want to do that, therefore I should be able to do all that. But the reality is that you can't."

"Even in the place of suffering we've got that sense of entitlement. It shouldn't happen to us. We know that bad things happen to other people out there, but why should bad things happen to me?"

"It's through hard times that you potentially can fall, but it's actually through those hard times that God teaches you more about himself and you grow more. According to Romans 5, it's through enduring that you develop character and you become a more resilient Christian because you've kept going."

Worldliness helps understand why people accept the lies of Satan, Ramsay says. For example, when it comes to people caught up in adultery, he says, "When you talk to them, they say that they were unhappy and wanted more happiness."

THE WORD

The third principle is to embrace the tried and true method of returning to reading the Scriptures. During her illness and forced break, Condie picked up the Bible and anchored herself in one key chapter until God's word saturated her soul.

"I was encouraged to meditate on Psalm 23, particularly the verses about 'He makes me lie down' as that was all I could do at the time," she says. "I read Psalm 23 every day for a month and found that an amazing experience."

"That verse – 'He restores my soul' – I thought a lot about that. What does a restored soul look like? Because I think I felt quite bruised and I felt like everything that defined me had been taken away."

"But was that true? I started answering those questions from God's word. And I discovered a way of reading God's word that fed my soul in a way that I'd never experienced before. So that was another revival time. And since then I don't think I've ever looked back. God's just kept teaching me more and more and more."

"If you fill your mind with God, you want to please him. It's not out of a sense of duty but it's because you love him. And delighting in God's word leads to delight in God."

Fourth, prayer is essential. "I have seen that if I want to change, then asking for God's help has been a great place to start," Condie says.

She herself prays through Psalm 86 weekly, with particular focus on verses 11-12:

Teach me your way, Lord

That I may rely on your faithfulness;

Give me an undivided heart,

That I may fear your name.

I will praise you, Lord my God,

With all my heart;

I will glorify your name forever.

For great is your love toward me.

Also, she finds a prayer by 18th century English-American evangelical George Whitefield helpful: "Give me a deep humility, a well-guided zeal, a burning love and a single eye and then let men or devils do their worst!"

Ramsay says prayer is a weapon in the hands of those in danger of falling, but also for fellow Christians in helping to keep others from falling.

"How do I pray for someone who I think is running on empty?" he asks. "And who models that prayer for me? What guidance do I get?"

"Do I pray: 'Heavenly Father, I pray for my friend, may he die before he commits adultery?' I've never heard that prayer in church. I've never heard a prayer like the prayer of Agur in Proverbs 30:7-9:

Two things I ask of you, Lord;

do not refuse me before I die;

Keep falsehood and lies far from me;

give me neither poverty nor riches,

but give me only my daily bread.

Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you

and say, 'Who is the Lord?'

Or I may become poor and steal,

and so dishonour the name of my God."

THE THANKFUL HEART

Finally, Condie's fifth point is to develop a habit of thankfulness to God. Do this through the aforementioned prayer or by keeping a journal.

"If you start doing this, it really changes your whole perspective," she says. "I try and remind myself every day that I am saved by grace and grace alone and that I am God's precious child. That is something I am so thankful for!"

"Every day I was speaking to about her guilt wondered if she is forgiven. I said to her to write down every day one thing she's thankful to God about. A week later, she said, 'I so love doing this but I couldn't keep to one [thing]'. She asked, 'Is it okay if I think of three or four things?' I said 'Go for it'."

"If you have the habit of mind to look back on your day and rather than moaning and groaning you notice the good. That changes how you do life, really."

There is always hope for God's people who have fallen – Christ's blood on the cross is proof of that. Moses killed an Egyptian, King David committed adultery and sent Bathsheba's husband to his death, Peter denied Jesus three times and Paul imprisoned the first Christians. All were restored to, by and for the Lord.

"How do people turn it around?" Ramsay asks. "They turn to Jesus."

Some hard questions have to be asked first, however. "I try not to ask the binary question: 'Do you want to come back?' he says. "I'd much rather ask the clarifying or evaluative question: 'What's holding you back? How much do you want to?'"

The person who seeks restoration through the grace of Christ also has to ask themselves hard questions, he says.

"When I realise I've got to turn it around, then I've got to ask myself the question: 'Do I really want to do that? Am I prepared to take the shame of it?' Obviously, I'm not ready to turn my life around if I still don't want anyone to know about my sin and I'm hiding it inside myself. There's got to be humility and teachability."

How do restored Christians then deal with the guilt? "Christ. Confession. Confidence," Ramsay says.

"First, Christ: it's got to be about Jesus and the cross. I've got to front up to Christ. That's the first and last thing."

"It's not going to see a psychologist – as helpful as they are – to help me understand myself or to make wiser decisions and overcome my anxiety and depression. It's got to be Christ and what he has done for us."

"Confession: articulating what it is. It appears to be me that no psalmist ever ends up an atheist. "Each psalmist actually vomits out this awful stuff but they haven't turned their back on God and are cursing the world. The psalmist asks 'Why, why, why' but says, 'I'm still talking to you, God.'"

Ramsay's third point, confidence, is understanding that if you repent of all your sins and trust in Christ's mercy, then if you died tonight you will be with Christ.

Scott Monk is a journalist, author and student minister.

To watch the powerful interview of the two men at MBM Rooty Hill dealing with adultery go to mbm.org.au/stories/

OUR STORIES

TRANSFORMED LIVES THROUGH JESUS CHRIST TO THE GLORY OF GOD

MBM

at all times available

Safe with the sovereign

As the world changes ever more quickly around us God's purposes still prevail, writes **MARK THOMPSON**.

WHEN THE VISIGOTH KING ALARIC I INVADED AND SACKED THE CITY OF Rome in 410AD, the Bishop of Hippo Regis, Augustine, wrote one of the great classics of Western literature in response: *The City of God against the Pagans*. Augustine thought deeply about what the Bible had to say to a moment like this, when all the certainties of a civilisation appeared to be lost forever.

In summary, he reminded his readers that there are two cities – the city of God and the city of man. The city of man, in its various guises, may rise and fall but the city of God is unaffected, impregnable and radiant.

As American evangelical leader Al Mohler puts it, "in the city of man there are no final victories and no final losses. Every victory can be undone and every loss overturned. In the city of God, though, there are no losses".

Citizens of the city of God who live within the city of man need not fear. Indeed, they can live confidently in the midst of a crumbling society because the God who claimed them for his own is so magnificently sovereign and entirely committed to the eternal welfare of his people. His purposes cannot be derailed. His truth and righteousness cannot be compromised. His power cannot be diminished. His mercies never come to an end.

This did not mean that the changes people experienced in 410AD were illusory, or that the uncertainty they faced was merely a state of mind. The fall of Rome was bad. It did bring suffering in its wake and life in Western Europe changed dramatically as a consequence. Though there were rays of light and significant achievements in the centuries that followed, the sack of Rome by Alaric is usually taken as the beginning of the Dark Ages. The peace, prosperity and achievements of Rome were lost.

In reality the end had been coming for some time. Corruption usually proceeds by increments. One decision after another in the centuries leading up to August 24, 410 had fragmented the empire and spread decay. Those who had spoken of the dire consequences of these decisions were ridiculed, silenced and in some cases punished. Yet the day came when those who "sowed the wind" finally "reaped the whirlwind" (to use Hosea's image).

Of course, the situation was far more complex than I have been able to outline in a couple of hundred words. Nevertheless, there is much that can be learned from Augustine's confidence in the face of fear, uncertainty, loss and change. He echoes the stance taken again and again in the Scriptures.

King David wrote of the immovable glory and power of the living God in the face of a concerted attempt by those with influence and authority to oppose him:

Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the Lord and against his Anointed, saying, "Let us burst their bonds apart and cast away their cords from us". He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, "As for me, I have set my King on Zion my holy hill" (Ps 2:1-6).

In the face of opposition David, the Old Testament Christ, anchored his confidence in the unshakeable sovereignty of God.

This laughter in the heavens is not the cruel indifference to suffering later exhibited by Nero, who was famously (though perhaps not entirely accurately) portrayed as the one who "fiddled while Rome burned". Rather it is a graphic statement of the futility of the world's opposition to God and his rule. It does not make the slightest dent in his sovereignty or his unstoppable purpose.

The rebellion will be answered. The suffering of the victims will not be ignored. The persecution of those God has chosen and called to himself will be taken seriously. But in the meantime, the point David is underlying is how futile this concerted, carefully planned opposition to God and his purposes really is. In the cold light of eternal reality, it is pitiful and pathetic.

The words of Psalm 2 were taken up by the apostle Peter in Jerusalem following his release from prison. In the prayer of the gathered disciples, which Peter presumably led, a recital of those words was followed by: "truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel" – the whole world was implicated – "to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place" (Acts 4:27-28).

On the day of the most concentrated opposition to the rule and purpose of God, God was not thwarted in the slightest but was, in these very events, working out his plan to save. "You crucified and killed him by the hands of lawless men," Peter had said to the crowds on the day of Pentecost. But it was all "according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God" (Acts 2:23). God was not taken by surprise, nor was he held in check for even a moment.

This perspective of God's pure, holy and untouchable sovereignty – always the sovereignty of the one who is gracious and merciful and loving – is something we need to remember in our own moment of universal history. There is no need for us to be alarmist. Uncertainty and even fear in the face of seismic changes in the cultural perspectives of the West is perfectly understandable. A culture with such substantial roots in the Christian faith has seemingly accelerated its abandonment of those roots (and from the start it had other poisonous roots as well).

While each day of our parliament begins with the Lord's Prayer, hardly anybody knows why and next to no one is in the chamber when it is said. Voices are calling for an end to the freedom of thought, expression and assembly enjoyed by Christians in the West for centuries.

There is a new, open hostility to Christian institutions and Christian faith. Sometimes it is accompanied by quite sophisticated arguments appealing to the virtues of an entirely secular public space and supposedly more basic human rights (there are deeper, richer answers to each of these arguments, of course). The challenges come from so many directions – compounded, tragically, by our own failures and compromises over the years – that it sometimes appears overwhelming.

Yet while so many things seem to be changing right now, the most important things are entirely unchanged. God is still God. Jesus is still Lord. His determination to stand with his people, directing them and shaping them toward a magnificent future – "a new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells" (2 Pet 3:13) – is as firm and sure as ever. The proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ is still the powerful way God saves people (Rom 1:16). The mission Christ gave to his disciples, to make disciples of all nations until the end of the age, has not been rescinded (Matt 28:18-20; 24:14).

It is worth remembering that far more intense opposition than we anticipate in our future is already being experienced by our brothers and sisters in many parts of the world. They know the deep truth of Jesus' words, "if they persecuted me, they will also persecute you" (John 15:20), and those of the apostle Paul, "all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted" (2 Tim 3:12).

Yet they know, too, that God has not abandoned them, and in their weakness they see his power. He is still their only refuge, their only strength, and their only hope. Our privileges and protections have been accompanied so often by compromises and superficial religion. Their experiences of intense opposition and suffering, of being faced with the starkness of the choice to follow Jesus with all its consequences, more often leads to a deep trust in the one who bore the heat of human hostility towards God and overcame it in his resurrection.

We in Australia and the Western world are not facing a re-run of the cataclysm of 410AD. Not yet. We are watching the downward spiral of Romans 1 play out before our eyes but we pray that God in his mercy might yet choose to pull us back from the brink. He has done it before. "No final losses," the wise man said.

It is only God who can rescue us, whether on an individual or on a social scale, and he has promised to act in response to the prayers of his people. So as the changes continue, let us not despair or be afraid. Let us not surrender to alarmism. Instead, let us pray to him who taught us: "In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

The Rev Dr Mark Thompson is the principal of Moore College.



Thumbs up for ministry

THERE WAS THUNDEROUS APPLAUSE IN ST ANDREW'S CATHEDRAL, AND HUGS AND PLENTY OF pictures outside, as 26 men and women were ordained as deacons for various ministries around Sydney and Wollongong.

From school chaplaincy to Arabic ministry in Sydney's southwest, some ordinands will be starting fresh while others will continue the ministry they have been involved in during training.

Archbishop Glenn Davies said the service was the culmination of years of education, training and study in the Bible. "This is a very significant day for them because they are entering into a service of God for the rest of their lives," he said. "It is a service where they will seek to proclaim the Lord Jesus to people, to seek out the lost, to encourage the saints and to glorify the Lord Jesus."



The newly ordained Rev Caroline Andrews (left), who is the Growing Believers minister at St James', Croydon, was surrounded by well-wishers.

"It is a really exciting day to celebrate with family, our friends and our church – it's a real moment to acknowledge the ministry I have been doing and to recommit to serving God and his church for as many days as he gives me," she said.

Arabic ministry got a boost with the ordination of the Rev Sami Youkhana, who leads the Arabic congregation at Hoxton Park.

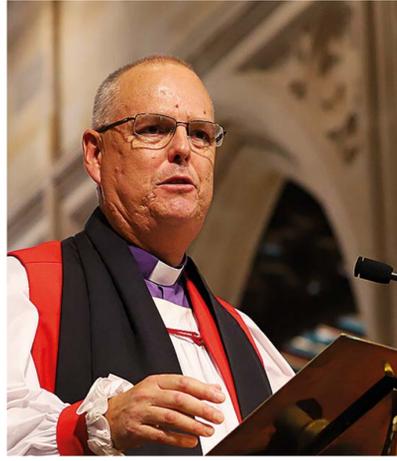
"We have been here four years and the Lord has blessed us," Mr Youkhana said. "I am really grateful for what the Lord did in everything here, for the ministry.

"My ordination will give us more authority and help the church settle more. People when they come to the church will say, 'Oh, we have an ordained pastor – this means this is a legal church'. This is very important thinking for the Arabic tradition." As a deacon, he will also be able to perform weddings for the growing congregation.

The Bishop of Wollongong, Peter Hayward (left), spoke to the ordinands, borrowing from the old hymn "Amazing Grace".

"What is the power to soften the apathetic heart of ourselves – of anyone? Grace! God's move towards us in his son Jesus Christ," Bishop Hayward said. "It is there for all because Christ is there for all. Grace is where you start and grace is where you finish."

The 26 men and women who emerged smiling from the Cathedral are determined to share that grace as widely as possible.



Deacons with their regional bishops (clockwise from above left): Michael Stead (South Sydney), Chris Edwards (Northern Region); Ivan Lee (Western Sydney) and Peter Hayward (Wollongong); and main pic (top) Peter Lin (Georges River).



Deacons with their regional bishops (clockwise from above left): Michael Stead (South Sydney), Chris Edwards (Northern Region); Ivan Lee (Western Sydney) and Peter Hayward (Wollongong); and main pic (top) Peter Lin (Georges River).

ORDINANDS 2018

Daniel Allan

Turrumurra

Caroline Andrews

Croydon

Tom Barrett

North Epping

David Binggeli

Freshwater

Michael Burgess

Panania

David Chang

Campsie

Ross Collins

West Pymble

Darryl Diener

Mosman Preparatory

School

Ben George

Auburn

Richard Glover

Ashfield

Clarence Huin

West Pennant Hills

Joshua Maule

Jannali

Jason McPhail

Dapto

Jeremy Morris

Drummoyne

Brie Pattison

Meriden Anglican

School

Martin Robinson

Randwick

Olivia Robson

Gymea

Adam Scott

Pennant Hills

James Shepherd

Balgowlah

Edwin Thambyaiyah

Stanhope Gardens

Steve Thurgar

Eagle Vale

Nigel Vaux

Glenmore Park

Antony Weiss

Christ Church St

Laurence

Chris White

SHORE (Sydney

Church of England

Grammar School)

Harram Xu

Parramatta

Sami Youkhana

Hoxton Park



Family snaps (from top): the Rev Ben George, the Rev Sami Youkhana and the Rev James Shepherd.



Smile! Archbishop Davies joins ordinands for the official photo on the Cathedral steps.



Hula hula hallelujah

A UKULELE FESTIVAL SEEMS AN UNLIKELY GOSPEL OPPORTUNITY, BUT THAT'S RECKONING WITH- out the enthusiastic community outreach of St Hilda's, Katoomba.

For almost a decade the Blue Mountains Ukulele Festival has been held on a February weekend, and this year – thanks to the suggestion of a keen ukulele-playing clergyman – St Hilda's hosted a special Sunday service that had the church overflowing with people.

"Last October I got a call from Larry Galbraith, the minister of the Church of Christ at Epping... who said he was performing at the festival and wondered if we would be willing to run a ukulele service on the Sunday morning," says Katoomba rector the Rev Ray Robinson. "I wasn't sure what a ukulele service was, but I said I'd give it a go if I could wear my Hawaiian shirt!"

A service was put together that included songs playable on the ukulele, and Mr Galbraith – as part of his performance on the Saturday night – invited those in attendance to come to church the next day.

Music scores had been prepared with the expectation that about 50 people might come, Mr Robinson says, but "people started showing up an hour before the service... by the time it started, it was standing room only!

"One church member counted 178 ukuleles and, in total, there was about 300 people, so many spilt onto the street outside.

"Church members who came a little late discovered they had nowhere to sit but they were very gracious in welcoming the visitors."

He adds that churchgoers and visitors alike got stuck into the spirit of the service, singing songs such as "Hula Hula Hallelujah" ("One or two even broke out into a little hula dance!"), and he describes the sight of nearly 200 people strumming away as a "fantastic spectacle".

"I told the congregation before I gave a gospel message that I was a little disappointed in the lack of Hawaiian shirts but that I'm sure we could do better next year," Mr Robinson says.

"All in all it was a lot of fun and a great gospel opportunity – with not only many Christians from other churches visiting, but many interested non-believers part of the fun. It's in the calendar for 2019!"

Easter cinema

JUDY ADAMSON

Mary Magdalene

Rated M

Paul, Apostle of Christ

Expected rating: M

AS EASTER APPROACHES THIS YEAR, TWO MAJOR FILMS ON BIBLICAL THEMES ARE about to be released: *Mary Magdalene*, starring Rooney Mara in the title role with Joaquin Phoenix as Jesus, and *Paul, Apostle of Christ* with James Faulkner in the title role. On one hand we can rejoice that, as we prepare to remember the death and celebrate the resurrection of Jesus, the heart of the Bible's story of salvation will be onscreen.

But, as is ever the case with God's word on film, we need to be prepared for truth and fiction to collide.

At the outset, there are two main differences between the films: *Mary Magdalene* is a secular production while *Paul, Apostle of Christ* is not.



Mary is Jesus' confidante and is given a role among the disciples that annoys Peter (Chiwetel Ejiofor) – as well it might, given that Mary seems to have his biblical leadership! She is also the one whose faith is strong and clear in the face of danger to Jesus in Jerusalem.

The film is beautifully shot and Rooney Mara is incredibly poised and authentic as Mary – and, praise God, Jesus' story is told amid it all – but you could wish that there wasn't quite so much invention happening.

Should that matter? Not necessarily, but while *Mary* is directed by Garth Davis, who was behind the lens of *Lion*, the story takes the little that is truly known about Mary Magdalene from the Bible and happily expands upon it.

It's one thing for the character to be determined to tell her tale in order to share the bigger story of Jesus her saviour, but that isn't quite what's happening. The writers have created a character who is central to all that happens in Jesus' ministry and is (for the sake of the viewing audience?) much more modern in outlook. First century girl power!

Mary is Jesus' confidante and is given a role among the disciples that annoys Peter (Chiwetel Ejiofor) – as well it might, given that Mary seems to have his biblical leadership! She is also the one whose faith is strong and clear in the face of danger to Jesus in Jerusalem.

The film is beautifully shot and Rooney Mara is incredibly poised and authentic as Mary – and, praise God, Jesus' story is told amid it all – but you could wish that there wasn't quite so much invention happening.



Above: Jim Caviezel as Luke (left) with James Faulkner as Paul.

Top: Rooney Mara as Mary Magdalene and Joaquin Phoenix as Jesus.

Paul, Apostle of Christ is another matter. Produced by Affirm Films (*Risen*, *The Star*), the film is clearly seeking to tell the story of Jesus through the story of Paul.

Luke the doctor (Jim Caviezel) is concerned to ensure that all God has done through Paul can be written down for the encouragement of believers (in what, presumably, will become the book of Acts). He goes to where Paul is imprisoned in Rome so the apostle can relate his story.

Of course, there is fiction here, too. While it's believed Luke was with Paul in Rome for up to two years, he also travelled with the apostle on some of his missionary journeys and was close to him for a long time before his imprisonment. He would have known much of Paul's Christian history and conversion story already. He may even have accompanied Paul to Rome in the first place!

The film also seems to suggest that if Luke doesn't get this story out to encourage believers, the persecuted church might give up. Why say that? As Paul helpfully reminds Luke, it's Jesus who is the focus, not him. And it's Jesus' story that is the heart of the gospel, not Paul's. In addition, the apostle also wrote to numerous people and churches from prison – to places where, of course, the gospel was being preached – and we know that God's word doesn't return to him empty.

So, yes, we could pick a few holes in these dramatic devices but the words of the Bible are often on the actors' tongues, and the tagline for *Paul, Apostle of Christ* is where the heart of the film is: "Where sin abounds... grace abounds more".

Thank the Lord that it does. And let us take our friends to see these films and share what the word says so they can learn about this grace for themselves.

52

Wascally wabbits



JUDY ADAMSON

Peter Rabbit

Expected rating: PG

BEATRIX POTTER'S CUTE, COAT-WEARING BUNNY HAS MADE MANY APPEARANCES onscreen, but this live-action film, with chatty CGI rabbits (interspersed with the odd piece of animation), is a version for the 21st century.

That's not entirely a good thing. I don't know whether kids these days read Beatrix Potter any more, but given how gentle it is I can't imagine the original stories would appeal to any but the youngest children. That's pretty sad as Potter's beautiful illustrations, simple tales and love of the country are just as worthy of appreciation as ever.

But back to the movie. When I say this is a 21st century *Peter Rabbit* I mean it in more ways than one. Not for us the tale of a mischievous boy having adventures in Mr McGregor's garden with his best friend – and being scolded by his mum when he doesn't follow her advice and comes home without any buttons on his coat. That's far too tame.

The makers' plan is clear. That's a surrogated scene, sparrows singing a happy, twee song are quickly brought to ground. Literally. As narrator (and the voice of Flopsy) Margot Robbie briskly tells us, that's *not* the kind of story they're telling.

First, both Peter's parents are dead instead of just his father, so there's really no one to hold him to account for his actions. Second, the rabbits have a sweet neighbour named Bea (Rose Byrne, right) who loves and protects them from old Mr McGregor (Sam Neill).

Third, we move fairly quickly from country smarts to high-tech hijinks from Wiley E. Coyote would have been proud of.

At the outset, Peter (James Corden) commands an assault on Mr McGregor's veggie patch with the help of his cousin Benjamin (Colin Hanks) and his sisters Flopsy (Robbie), Dopsy (Elizabeth Debicki) and Cotton-Tail (Daisy Ridley). Shortly after, when Peter returns to the garden to retrieve his jacket, Mr McGregor captures him – only to die of a heart attack. Ha, ha... surprise, kiddies!

The old fellow leaves the house and garden to his uptight, country-hating great-nephew Thomas (Domhnall Gleeson, right), but by the time Thomas arrives with plans to sell the property the animals have taken it over. The house resembles a student dump and while the rabbits are all having "fun" no one's taking any responsibility for the house, or each other.

Shortly afterwards Thomas meets Bea (Beatrix – get it?) and the two hit it off. She's presented as a surrogate mum to Peter, but he becomes as angry as a jilted boyfriend. He and Thomas scheme to get rid of each other, and the adolescent pranks escalate from there.

There are tips of the hat to Beatrix Potter's greatest concerns – such as saving wildlife and the land – but I don't know that she would have approved of (or even recognised) very much of the rest of it.

Still, one can only judge a film on its own merits. While some actions and reactions are over the top, particularly the totally unnecessary allergy scene where Thomas has to stab himself with an EpiPen, the kids at the preview I saw seemed delighted with the whole thing. There were many shouts of laughter and chattering of excitement, and the characters' crazy antics thrilled them in the same way the silliness of Coyotes or Rascal Bugs Bunny delighted me as a child.

It helps if you don't go into the cinema expecting to see the original stories. They're just a springboard, but most of the tale that follows does have its own charm amid the slick jokes and sassy bunny attitudes. The CGI and live action are also woven together so well that you don't miss a beat. In addition, despite their bad behaviour both Peter Rabbit and Thomas McGregor have redeeming qualities that become apparent to each other – and to us – by the end of the movie.

Be aware, though, that some moments might be a little too alarming for a younger audience, such as the EpiPen sequence, old Mr McGregor's death and perhaps even his attack on Peter – or the death of Peter's father, who was made into a pie. What you see in a storybook is always more alarming in live action sequences!

It's really up to you to respond in a way that suits your family best.

53

