

Wednesday 15th April 2020

Dear South Wagga Anglican Church Family,

I trust you enjoyed your Easter weekend and found a meaningful way to reflect and celebrate the One who was crucified and resurrected for our sake. I was delighted to hear that many enjoyed the Combined Churches Easter Sunday Service as well as various other opportunities broadcast on TV. It is wonderful that there are many churches in Wagga willing to work together in this way. Over the coming weeks we will, in our Sunday (online) services, explore the lectionary readings that portray the resurrected Jesus appearing to his disciples. I am conscious that the resurrection marked the pivotal point in history where Jesus, through his subsequent ascension and giving of His Spirit, commissioned the church to be the community that continues to witness to all these remarkable Christ events. This has got me thinking about how we reach out when we cannot go out. How do we evangelise or promote the gospel when we cannot meet up with others and gather as a church? I have three thoughts about being missional in this season:

1. *Think locally:* I have engaged with my neighbours more in the last few weeks than I have for many months. We have delivered a SWAC-care pack to a household on our street, checked in with our elderly neighbours and conversed more with our other younger neighbours.
2. *Family and friendship networks:* I have heard many stories from around our parish of people sending our material to families and friends, and even advertising the availability of our content throughout their retirement village. This COVID-19 crisis has shaken Australians and opened people up to a willingness to think about meaningful things.
3. *Digitally:* We are not to meet up with people, but we can still represent Jesus on social media platforms or communicate via email or in writing via cards or letters. There is much more time for people to be online or to be reading and writing and therefore people will be available to engage in these ways.

During term 1 (before churches were closed) we were exploring the idea that promoting the gospel is a wholistic activity of prayer, good deeds, godliness, and verbal proclamation. Rodney Stark, a sociologist of religion, writes an intriguing analysis of the rise of early Christianity from a room full of bewildered followers to the majority religion in the whole of the Roman Empire – a 40 percent per decade growth rate over a few hundred years. One of the reasons, humanly speaking, that Stark outlines for this remarkable growth, was the way Christians cared for the sick during two dreadful epidemics which wiped out up to half of the population. Because Christians attended to the sick, less Christians died, and surviving pagans were drawn to the worship of a God who inspired love rather than fear and abandonment. Today, in a society that is profoundly shaped by a Judeo-Christian ethic, the sick are cared for through our public health system. Our loving responsibility is to wash our hands and ensure we practice social distancing. And yet, we do so not out of fear, but from the loving heart of God, and therefore we reach out beyond the divide of social distancing and connect with others in writing, online, next door (appropriately) and in a myriad of ways that God will open up for us. For many of us this will mean a renewed commitment to pray for others, and the Apostle Paul certainly coveted the prayers of his sending churches, to advance his apostolic mission. Let's continue, in this season, to be both Christ-centred and outward looking.

On this note of evangelism, I am starting a reading group that will work through Timothy Keller's *Reason for God*. This book is, in my view, the most accessible and pertinent apologetic resource currently available. Christian apologetics is the art of giving answers for the reasonableness and truth of Christian faith, and Keller's book will serve to confirm your own faith commitment while also helping you articulate the reason for the hope that you have. Please contact me if you would like a copy of the book ordered for you (it is also available as an e-book) and let me know if you would like to join the reading group which will be a closed *Facebook* group or a weekly email discussion.

For those who would like to more formally take up some certificate level theological study I will also be facilitating the *PTC* Moore College course. Currently you can enroll in a subject for only \$25 and if graduating with a 'certificate' is unimportant to you, you can choose not to sit any exams. It is a complete online correspondence course but doing it alongside (digitally) folk from SWAC will be an encouragement to you. It is rigorous, but you don't have to be an academic in order to enjoy it, and succeed in completing subjects. If this interests you, please contact me and I will organise a parish group working on the same subject(s) and facilitate the learning through an online discussion forum. I have attached an information brochure to the email that this letter was sent with.

Finally, a reminder that the office is closed although I am at St Paul's on most mornings and can receive donated food for distribution. We have opened a new Post Office box for any cheques to be sent securely: *PO Box 7010, Wagga Wagga, NSW 2650*.

May God continue to do more than we ask or imagine in bringing glory to Himself through His people.

Your Rector,



Scott Goode

