



Newsletter of

St Luke's Uniting Church

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THE MESSENGER

SUMMER 2021-22

Minister's Message

Bringing Christmas to birth in a pandemic

I've said to a lot of people over the last month that I feel like it was March the 154th and then it was suddenly December. After learning the hard way in 2020 and especially in 2021 that planning ahead was a fraught exercise, Advent and Christmas have landed with a suddenness that feels indecent and without me having the kind of plans I normally would have. The sudden-feeling return to in-person gatherings and the subsequent logistics of QR-coding and vaccination checking, covid-cleaning and mask uncertainty have been challenging for the Church Council and for me as minister.

There are some parallels with Luke's story of the birth of Jesus. While there wasn't a pandemic raging, in Luke's account of Jesus' birth there is a government-imposed order which forces Joseph and Mary to leave their hometown of Nazareth and journey to Bethlehem, significantly disrupting their lives and any plans they'd made. The pair are already in strange health circumstances, as Mary is mysteriously pregnant. There has been a long wait for the arrival of the baby, and a long journey from Nazareth to Bethlehem, most likely on foot over several days. The waiting probably continued in Bethlehem – note that Luke's text only says that 'while they were there, the time came for Mary to have her baby' – and if they had indeed travelled for a census, they were probably required to be there a while because bureaucracy has always involved waiting longer than everyone expects.

Near the time when our Lilian was born, her due date was fast approaching and each day, we would live on 'standby'. We couldn't plan very far ahead because we couldn't know when we would need to go to the hospital for the birth. It was almost Easter, and I'd planned the whole Easter service ahead of time, so that if I needed to, I could hand my sermon to a congregation member and run out the door. As it turned out, I was able to deliver my sermon and still be present for

Lilian's delivery. We had an appointment for Susan to be induced on the evening of Easter day, so we went to the hospital and the medical team administered oxytocin, though Susan had already begun labour by this time. In what seemed like moments, we went from waiting and waiting for something to happen, to everything happening at once.

We were in a modern hospital, with state-of-the-art equipment, surrounded by experts, and this wasn't our first child, but it was still an intense experience for me, and I won't try to describe how it was for Susan! I can only begin to imagine what it must have been like for Joseph and Mary – miles from home in a crowded house with none of the medical advances we know (not even hot water and towels), but with the communal knowledge of high rates of maternal and infant mortality in childbirth. Indeed, this is the one thing we can be historically certain of about Jesus' birth – it was inherently risky for mother and baby.

Of course, a new reality emerges with the birth of a child. Waiting ends and parenting begins (or continues) and life is never the same. As we emerge from lockdowns into Christmas, and from a house-bound winter and spring into a summer of renewed freedom, our waiting has ended, but we know the pandemic is still here, that our reality has changed. We can still face the future with hope, because in love God sent his son into the world to be the prince of peace, and to bring joy to the world. Whatever the pandemic has changed, whatever it has taken from us, it cannot take from us the gift of Emmanuel, God with us. May we take this gift of Christmas, the enduring presence of the eternal God, and share it through acts of love, a commitment to peace, a determination to hope and an embrace of joy, whatever circumstances we find ourselves in.

Grace and Peace,

James

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From the Church Council

The Church Council has continued to function during this COVID time. We have held our meetings on Zoom, until the last meeting, for which we were able to meet face-to-face.

The expectation is that our worship services will continue, offering Zoom as an alternative for those who wish to use this avenue. It is an expectation that all attending physically will be double vaccinated, for the safety of all.

We were pleasantly surprised with a generous donation from St Mark's UC. Sadly, St Mark's has closed its doors. The donation will be used in association with the development of the St Luke's sound system, including a sound desk. Thank you, St Mark's.

At a recent worship service, we heard from Riak Kirr, a community worker with Sudanese families and young people. Riak is working from the Pakenham UC community in a Mission Project. This project has been approved by Presbytery. St Luke's congregation accepted the proposal that we support Riak in this intergenerational ministry role.

We thank Lawrie and Yvonne Smith for their time as booking agents for our church buildings. They have been diligent and helpful with all who have inquired, and take responsibility for bookings, keys and other arrangements. Thank you both!

The responsibility for bookings has been taken over by Barbara Fowler and Clair Kendall. Please make sure you contact them with dates for 2022. Thanks, Barbara and Clair.

The RCCC are celebrating their 20th Anniversary of worshipping at St Luke's, in December. We are grateful for their friendship, co-operation and cheerful involvement in our activities; and we enjoy interacting with them in worship, singing and the shared lunches. All these activities will resume, hopefully, as soon as we are able, within the COVID restrictions.

Since our last edition, we have had some sadness with the deaths of three most esteemed members of our congregation – June Bann, Pat Stephenson and Aldyth Williams. All of these have held unique positions in the life of St Luke's, and we have many happy memories of their involvement. Our love and prayers are extended to these families.

The Church Council extends thanks to all who have enabled St Luke's community to continue throughout this difficult COVID time:

- all members of the Ministry Groups,
- Edna Deans, for the weekly e-news collation and distribution,
- Ann Langley, as editor of the Messenger,
- Yvonne Stent and Lois Longthorp, who have supplied the artificial flowers to decorate our church,
- the Sound crew working on Zoom production,
- the musicians,
- Heather Molina, who has maintained the communication throughout this time,
- James, Susan and family, who have ensured the Zoom services continued.

St Luke's is specially blessed to have such a cohesive community.

Christmas Blessings to all, wishing you good health and happiness.

We look forward to 2022 being a more normal year, with our in-person activities resuming and continuing.

Eunice Magee

The following Memorial Minutes were included in the Church Council Minutes recently:

Memorial Minute for June Bann

10/12/1930–29/9/2021

We acknowledge with sadness the death of Margery June Bann (June), who has been a faithful member of St Luke's from its early days in the 1960's.

June was one of our original musicians for worship services, an assistant in the kindergarten for many years, a teacher at Essex Heights Primary School and involved in a number of activities at St Luke's. These included: UCAF, Friendly Door, Tuesday Circle and Women Living Alone. June enjoyed handwork and craft and regularly donated goods to the Fete/Fiesta and Street Stalls. Her friendly demeanour and gentle sense of humour will be sadly missed. Our thoughts and prayers are with Rhonda, Steve, Kerrie and their family.



Memorial Minute for Aldyth Williams

6/8/27–29/11/21

It is with great sadness that we record the passing of Aldyth Williams. The Williams family have been involved with St Luke's for many years. Husband, Alan and son, Peter, were a major part of the construction team for the St Luke's worship centre. Aldyth participated in numerous activities at St Luke's: Sunday School teaching, UCAF, Fundraising (Fashion Parades), Friendly Door, Tuesday Circle, etc. The tea trolley and beautiful stained-glass windows in the Sanctuary remain as gifts from the Williams family.

We are so blessed to have memories of Aldyth, and we remember Ross, Peter and their families with sympathy and love.



The following Obituary for David Symington was published in The Age Newspaper on 12 December 2021, online link:

<https://www.theage.com.au/topic/obituaries-1qv>



An Engagingly Curious Educator

By Tom Spurling, Russell Tytler, Tony Lenten and John Symington

DAVID SYMINGTON *December 29, 1935 – August 4, 2021*

On August 23, 2021, as many members of his family as permitted by the lockdown rules gathered at St Luke's Uniting Church, Mount Waverley, to join friends and colleagues all around the world to farewell one of Australia's most distinguished science educators and researchers. David Symington had an engaging curiosity which he passed on to his students both secondary and tertiary. He had a generosity of spirit which endeared him to all.

David was born in Nyah West, Victoria, the oldest son of the Reverend John Symington, a Presbyterian Minister (later a Minister of the Uniting Church) and Hilda Williamson. The family moved to Dimboola and Castlemaine where David began his secondary education. In 1948, his family moved to Balaclava and David attended Caulfield North Central School before finishing his secondary education at Scotch College on a scholarship.

David was a “born teacher” and went to the University of Melbourne on an Education Department scholarship to complete a BSc and a Dip Ed. His first appointment was at Leongatha High School and then in 1965 as senior science and mathematics teacher at Mirboo North High School. David quickly made a strong impression in that role and was soon promoted to senior master (Vice-Principal) and then Acting Principal.

David was an outstanding teacher and highly regarded and respected by students, parents, colleagues and members of the broader Mirboo North community. David had the happy knack of finding the right balance between firmness and friendliness in his dealings with students. He set high academic standards and supported students with interesting and challenging activities that enabled them to meet his expectations. And, they did. David felt himself fortunate to be able to follow his passion for teaching.

In 1971, he accepted a position as a lecturer in primary science education at the Toorak Teacher’s College. He quickly became interested in science education research and completed an MEd and a PhD at Monash University (supervised by Peter Fensham, Age obituaries online, November 21). Toorak Teacher’s College eventually became part of Deakin University and David rose to become Dean of Primary Education in 1994. He was an Adjunct Professor of Science Education at Deakin from when he retired until his death in 2021.

David’s early research in primary science education focused on student learning and alternative conceptions from constructivist perspectives. He then developed a ground-breaking area of research in which researchers from Australia and New Zealand played an influential role. He investigated, for instance, students’ conceptions of plant reproduction (asking why do plants have flowers?), the place of children’s questions to drive learning in primary science, strategies for learning from museum visits and the power of drawing as a learning strategy. In his writing in those years, he partnered with influential science educators from Australia and New Zealand, including Peter Fensham.

In his role, from 2001, as Adjunct Professor of Science Education at Deakin, he was active in promoting a vision of science education reflecting the practices of science in authentic settings and in the community. He championed the vibrant role that rural communities could play in school science, bringing as ever a strong equity perspective to his research. Here also he drew on his experience at CSIRO, and his early years as a rural educator.

David is remembered as a wonderful colleague, supportive, insightful and with a dry and pervasive humour. He is credited with delivering one of the funniest ever after dinner speeches at the Australasian Science Education Research Association (ASERA) conference dinner. He was a founding member of ASERA and part of an important movement in establishing the status of primary science education research.

Soon after his retirement from Deakin University David joined CSIRO as a science communicator. He worked first at the Division of Molecular Science at Clayton and then as manager, public affairs and communications in the Office of the Deputy Chief Executive, Minerals and Energy Industries. While at CSIRO David became interested in ways to stimulate the emergence and growth of new technology-based companies, and in the role of publicly funded research agencies in this process. He co-authored an influential paper on this subject.

David was a very active member of the Uniting Church in all the communities where he lived. He was particularly interested in the link between the traditions of his faith to the social and political issues of the day. He was a great support to his wife, Corrie, in her work as a Minister in two Uniting Church congregations in Melbourne. Corrie is still involved in pastoral care work.

David’s six children, 11 grandchildren, and one great-grandson enjoyed not just David’s love and affection but also his engaging curiosity, which extended to whatever they were doing. David was equally adept at driving to sporting and social events, babysitting or looking after his son’s dairy farm. He was always the first to volunteer to read a thesis or article, even on subjects in which he had to come to terms with a completely foreign specialised vocabulary.

Tom Spurling, Russell Tytler and Tony Lenten were colleagues and friends of David Symington. John Symington is his oldest son.

Rembrandt and the Parable of the Prodigal Son

Tony Lenten

“When Rembrandt painted the Prodigal [Fig. 11], he had lived a life marked by great self-confidence, success, and fame, followed by many painful losses, disappointments and failures.”

Henri J. M. Nouwen. The Return of the Prodigal Son: A Story of Homecoming.

Jesus was a wonderful storyteller and everyone loves a good story. People of all ages and walks of life flocked to hear him. [Fig. 1]. He captured and held their attention by frequently telling parables or simple stories drawn from everyday life that contained a profound moral or spiritual truth. There are about 30 of these parables in the gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke; while there are none in the gospel of John, written later with a different focus than the other three.



Fig.1. Rembrandt. *Christ Preaching*. Etching. c.1652.

Jesus must have told parables so many times that at one point his disciples came to ask him: “Why do you speak to them in parables?” He answered, “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given ... The reason I speak to them in parables is that ‘seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand.’” (*Matthew 13:10, 11 & 13*)

So, Jesus regarded parables as circuit breakers, as a way of getting his message across where more conventional methods had failed. Many of the parables he told such as “*The Good Samaritan*” [Fig. 2] and the “*The Return of the Prodigal Son*” [Fig 3] still speak loudly and clearly to us today.



Fig.2. Rembrandt. *The Good Samaritan*. Etching. 1633.



Fig.3. Rembrandt. *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. Etching. 1636.

The great Dutch artist Rembrandt (1606–1669) was a wonderful storyteller too. Instead of using words, he told his stories with paint brushes, pencils, pen and ink and etching tools.

Rembrandt loved the Bible. He knew it well. In all, he created more than 300 works of art based on the stories, characters and events described in the Bible covering both the Old and New Testaments. About 60 of these works are paintings, while the remaining 240 or so are drawings and etchings. In 1637, when Rembrandt was 31 years of age the Dutch Reformed Church published a Bible for the first time in the Dutch language. Rembrandt bought a copy and read it frequently for the rest of his life. It was among his very few possessions when he died in poverty 32 years later.

The Biblical scholar A. Hyatt Mayor in his book *“Rembrandt and the Bible”* writes: “While Rembrandt may never have read the whole Bible, he read and re-read certain narratives until he lived their drama.” The parable of the prodigal son was chief among these. Rembrandt produced paintings, drawings and etchings related to it starting from around 1636 until his death in 1669.

Rembrandt expert Ludwig Goldscheider believes that the parable of the prodigal son is the “most beautiful of all the beautiful parables in the Gospels”. It is found only in the gospel of Luke. The story has a number of scenes. I’ve included many works by Rembrandt related to this parable to show how over time his fertile mind delved into the different aspects and subtleties of the story.

Scene 1. Departure

Luke 15:12–13. “Father, give me the share of the property that will belong to me. So he divided his property between them. A few days later the younger son gathered all he had and travelled to a distant country.”



Fig.4. Rembrandt. *The Departure of the Prodigal Son.* Pen and wash. c.1642.



Fig. 5. Rembrandt (attributed). *The Departure of the Prodigal Son.* Pen and wash. c.1640.

Comment: These two quick sketches by Rembrandt capture something of the drama and sadness associated with the prodigal son leaving his father and the family home. The drawing on the left [Fig. 4] shows the father delivering his parting blessing on his son. A servant holds his horse which is saddled and ready to transport the restless son to wherever and whatever might lie ahead.

The drawing on the right [Fig. 5] captures the moment where the son has one foot in the stirrup and is about to mount his horse. There is no going back from here. The son looks pleased with himself and very eager to commence his adventures. Rembrandt frequently included dogs in his art. Often it is employed as a symbol of fidelity. The defecating dog that Rembrandt includes in his etching of *The Good Samaritan* [Fig. 2] sits comfortably within the bawdiness of Dutch genre painting (scenes from everyday life). Rembrandt expert Simon Sharma suggests that: “Great art has dreadful manners.”

Scene 2. Luxury and decadence

Luke 15: 13. “... and there he squandered his property in dissolute living.”



Fig. 6. Rembrandt. *Self Portrait as the Prodigal Son*. Oil on canvas. 1636.



Fig. 7. Rembrandt. *The Prodigal Son with Loose Women*. Pen and wash. 1642.

Comment: For me, “*Self Portrait as the Prodigal Son*” [Fig. 6] by Rembrandt is one of the most astonishing works in the whole of western art. Not only has he depicted himself as the carousing, pleasure seeking prodigal son dressed in a fancy cavalier’s uniform but he has selected his good and conventional wife Saskia to be the model for a prostitute sitting on his knee in a brothel! As art critic Robert Hughes puts it: “There is an extremely vulgar side to Rembrandt. This in itself is no surprise, given the bawdry for which 17th century Holland was notable.” [Fig. 7].

At this stage Rembrandt was living a life of luxury. He had an impressive house, a huge art and book collection as well as costumes, ornaments and oddities assembled from around the world. This affluent life-style however was not to last. Within twenty years he was forced into voluntary bankruptcy. He died a pauper. It takes very little imagination to realise why he was so attracted to the story of the prodigal son in the later years of his life.

Scene 3. Degradation and despair

Luke 15: 15–17. “So he went and hired out to one of the citizens of that country, who sent him to his fields to feed the pigs. He would gladly have filled himself with the pods that the pigs were eating; and no-one gave him anything. But when he came to himself he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired hands have bread enough and to spare, but here I am dying of hunger!’”



Fig. 8. Rembrandt. *The Prodigal Son with Swine*. Pen and Ink. c.1650.

Comment: For the child of a rich family to be reduced to working with his hands was one thing, but working with pigs – which were abhorrent to Jews – was a sign of his downward slide into total destitution and degradation. The Biblical scholar J.G. Wood in “*Story of the Bible Animals*” describes the extent of the abhorrence that the Jewish people had for pigs: “Not only did the Jews refuse to eat the flesh of the hog, but they held in utter abomination everything that belonged to it, and would have thought themselves polluted had they even touched a hog’s bristle.”

Whilst Rembrandt himself was not Jewish he had a strong empathy for and understanding of their beliefs and customs. He could paint these scenes with genuine conviction; for a time he and Saskia had lived in the Jewish quarter of Amsterdam and he painted many “tronies” (faces in Dutch) of the face of Jesus using young Jewish men as models.

The gaunt and strained expression on the prodigal son’s face, drawn by Rembrandt with a minimum of lines, shows us that the bitter reality of his situation has finally hit him. [Fig. 8]. This drawing captures the moment where the son decides to return home and throw himself at the mercy of his father. Meanwhile, on the right of the drawing a piglet suckles on its mother. Is Rembrandt making a quiet point on the innate nature of parental care?

Scene 4. Contrition and forgiveness

Luke 15: 20-24. “So he set off and went to his father. But while he was still far off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion; he ran and put his arms around him and kissed him. Then the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly, bring out a robe – the best one – and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. And get the fatted calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found! And they began to celebrate.’”



Fig. 9. Rembrandt. *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. Pen and ink. c.1640.



Fig. 10. Rembrandt. *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. Pen and wash. 1642.

Comment: Rembrandt’s sketches of the “*The Return of the Prodigal Son*” above show two key moments in the story; one slightly ahead of the other. In the sketch on the left [Fig. 9], although the father and son are still physically apart the father’s arms are outstretched ready to embrace his son with love and forgiveness. The son kneels before his father in total humility and submission and is not prepared even to look at his father as if he’s unsure what his reception will be. The father’s face is virtually hidden from our view. The son is almost naked, his clothes reduced to tatters by his labours and travels.

In the second sketch [Fig. 10], the father and the son have physically and figuratively closed the gap between them and embrace each other. The son kneels before his father and receives his welcome and blessing. Through the genius of Rembrandt’s lines and restrained colours the bodies of the two figures blend into one being.

But the best is yet to come. Rembrandt's oil painting "*The Return of the Prodigal Son*" [Fig.11] is a mighty work. It is mighty in size (262cm or 8 feet 7 inches high by 205cm or 6 feet 8 inches wide). It is also mighty in conception and mighty in execution. And it has a mighty impact on viewers who see it in the flesh. Even though Rembrandt worked on it over the final six years of his life the painting was still unfinished when he died in 1669.



Fig. 11. *Rembrandt. The Return of the Prodigal Son. Oil on canvas. 1663 – 1669.*

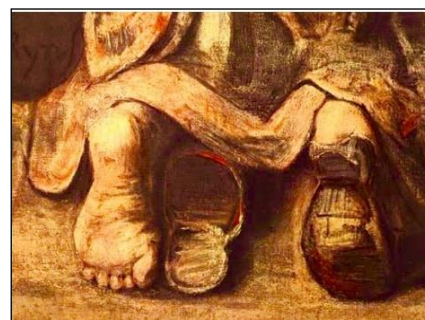
Rembrandt scholars are quick to sing the praises of this painting. The distinguished art expert Sir Kenneth Clark in his book "*An Introduction to Rembrandt*" leaves no doubt about how highly he rates Rembrandt and this painting in particular. He writes: "... there is a picture which those who have seen the original in Leningrad may be forgiven for claiming as the greatest picture ever painted. Putting aside the superlatives, we may agree that the gesture with which the father puts his hands on his son's shoulders, while his kneeling son presses his head to his father's heart, has an archetypal grandeur and pathos."

The Biblical scholar John Durham, also writes movingly of his personal response to this work. In his marvellous book "*The Biblical Rembrandt: Human Painter in a Landscape of Faith*" Durham tells us: "I have three times stood before this profoundly moving painting, and for as long as possible each time, drawn into it, warmed by it, blessed and forgiven in the immeasurable sense of grace pouring out from its surface."

There are six figures in the painting. Three are easy to recognise. The prodigal son and the father are on the left. The imperious and overbearing elder brother, full of suppressed anger, stands on the right. The other three figures are not as easy to identify. The very indistinct figure at the top left is possibly a female servant. Another female in the middle of the painting is thought to be either the mother or a sister. The seated male wearing a hat is thought to be a farm manager or perhaps a tax collector. Rembrandt's primary focus is firmly on the father and the son. His secondary focus is on the elder son and his reaction to what is taking place. The other figures play only minor roles in the painting perhaps as witnesses to what is taking place.

The opulent colours and textures glow as if there is a hidden light source within the painting. In this huge painted version Rembrandt moved away from the diagonal composition he used in the earlier sketches. [Figs. 9 & 10]. The father and son are now nearly at right angles to the front edge of the painting. The son's face is almost completely concealed from our view (compare this with the tortured face in Fig. 2). His hands are not visible. This means that the posture of his kneeling body and the position of his head alone must tell the story.

The face of the father is viewed front on. Writers such as Simon Sharma in his monumental tome *“Rembrandt’s Eyes”* have floated the idea that the father is now blind. [Fig 12]. This may partly explain the particular way he is touching his son. But I think that this explanation is unnecessary. In my view he is holding his son in this way to confirm that he has actually returned and as an expression of love and concern for his son. Rembrandt’s message is emphatic. The son is home.



Figs. 12, 13, 14. Details from Rembrandt’s oil painting *The Return of the Prodigal Son*. [Fig. 11]

A lot of attention has been given to the way that Rembrandt has painted the father’s hands and the son’s feet. For example, Ludwig Goldscheider in his commentary on this painting writes beautifully on the way Rembrandt has painted the father’s hands. He says: “Even in Rembrandt’s work nothing can compare with the expressiveness of the father’s two hands as they lie lovingly on the shoulders of the prodigal son. To this deep sensibility is joined a complete immobility of the figures.”

Many art experts have noted the difference in Rembrandt’s treatment of the father’s left and right hands. [Fig.13]. The one on the left is seen to be feminine, the one on the right masculine. A suggested explanation for this centres on the idea that the father, by forgiving his son, is carrying out the parental roles and duties of both a father and a mother. Other writers believe that as the father in the story is a proxy for God, the male and female hands represent the non-gender-specific attributes of God.

Attention has also been focussed on fact that the son is wearing only one sandal. [Fig. 14]. There may be a deep theological explanation for this but the simplest one to my mind is that Rembrandt wanted to emphasise the distance that the son had travelled and the difficulties he experienced on foot to get home, being unable to buy or hire a horse or a donkey or even a cheap pair of new sandals. The contrast between the circumstances of the father and the son couldn’t be more stark. One wears jewelled bracelets on both wrists. [Fig. 13]. The other hobbles home on worn out sandals stained with pig’s excrement. [Fig.14]. Even though the son was so poor and would have been a very unlikely target for a robbery, Rembrandt painted a dagger attached to his waste on his right-hand side for self-protection.

The Dutch priest Henri J.M. Nouwen in his book *“The Return of the Prodigal Son: a Story of Homecoming”* interestingly suggests that: “Rembrandt is as much the elder son of the parable as he is the younger. When, during the last years of his life, he painted both sons in *‘The Return of the Prodigal Son’* [Fig.11] he had lived a life in which neither the lostness of the younger son nor the lostness of the elder son was alien to him. Both needed healing and forgiveness. Both needed to come home. Both needed the embrace of a forgiving father. But from the story itself, as well as from Rembrandt’s painting, it is clear that the hardest conversion to go through is the conversion of the one who stayed home.”

Conclusion

Back in the 1960s I bought a book of sermons called *“The Waiting Father: Sermons on the Parables of Jesus”* by the German preacher and theologian Helmut Thielicke. It had a significant impact on my thinking. In his analysis of the parable of the prodigal son Thielicke suggests that too much emphasis has been given to the younger son (symbolising all of humanity) and not enough on the father (symbolising God) who waited patiently for his errant son to come to his senses and return home. Hence the title: *“The Waiting Father”*. It seems to me that Rembrandt perfectly captured that same idea in his painting of the *“Return of the Prodigal Son”* three hundred years before Thielicke wrote his book.

Rembrandt is the perfect artist to bring to life the parables of Jesus. He has the unique combination of artistic skills, life experience and feeling for humanity that such a task requires. In this case he took the most beautiful parable Jesus told (Goldscheider) to produce the greatest painting in the world (Clark).

A final thought. The leading twentieth-century existentialist theologian Paul Tillich wrote this comment in the margin of his Bible next to the parable of the prodigal son: “When the prodigal came home, I hope he didn’t stay too long.”

A brief Rembrandt chronology

- 1606** *Born in Leiden, a province of South Holland.*
- 1620** *Completes seven-year course at the Latin School, Leiden University. Commences art studies.*
- 1624** *Completes formal art training in Amsterdam and returns to Leiden.*
- 1625** *Completes first signed painting, “The Stoning of St Stephen”.*
- 1632** *Gains fame as a portrait painter in Amsterdam and The Hague.*
- 1633** *Develops his love of etching.*
- 1634** *Marries Saskia van Uylenburgh.*
- 1635** *First child Rombartus, a son, born – but dies within two months.*
- 1638** *Birth and death of his daughter Cornelia.*
- 1640** *Birth and death of his second daughter also called Cornelia.*
- 1641** *Another son, Titus, born and survives infancy.*
- 1642** *Saskia dies after years of ill health. Geertge Direx enters the Rembrandt home to look after the young Titus.*
- 1648** *Geertge Direx who had become Rembrandt’s mistress is replaced by Hendrickje Stoffels.*
- 1654** *Hendrickje is condemned by the church council for ‘fornication’ with Rembrandt. Four months later another daughter called Cornelia is born.*
- 1656-58** *Rembrandt’s goods and his house and contents are sold to pay off his creditors.*
- 1663** *Hendrickje dies.*
- 1668** *Son Titus marries and dies a just few months later.*
- 1669** *Rembrandt dies and is buried as a pauper in the Westerkerk, Amsterdam.*

Our Posting to Indonesia, 1968–1970

Colleen Wood

In 1968, our family went to live in Indonesia. At that time its population was 108 million people, while that of Australia was 12 million. This Muslim country to our near north, previously known as the Dutch East Indies, was still emerging, not only from centuries of colonial rule (Spanish, Portuguese, English and Dutch) and from Japanese occupation during World War II, but also from the 1965 attempted coup by the Communist party (PKI). The following year, the anti-communists went on a violent purge and many Indonesians, particularly Chinese, were executed. Just months before our arrival, General Suharto became president and placed former president Soekarno under house arrest.



My husband, Jim Wood, fresh out of university, joined the Department of External Affairs (now the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade). Shortly after moving to Canberra, we were informed that he was being posted to Indonesia, which was then classed as a 'hardship posting'. To prepare for the posting, we read the Indonesian Post Report issued by the Department. In reality, though, nothing could have prepared us for what we experienced. I was given nine hours of Bahasa Indonesia language tuition by a professor at the ANU. This equipped me with phrases such as 'selamat pagi' (good morning), 'terimah kasih' (thank you), and 'itu mahal' (that's expensive).

In September, we travelled to Djakarta via Singapore with our daughter, Erica, aged three years, and son Derek, 18 months. Tanks and military personnel were a visible presence on the streets. We spent the first week at the Hotel Indonesia, where we were told the rooms were bugged, so we turned up the radio when having a conversation.



The Wood family in Kebajoran

Jim began working at the Australian Embassy as a lowly Third Secretary in the diplomatic/political stream, as distinct from the consular stream. He was assigned responsibilities for Industrial Relations, which meant he met local trade union leaders, and hosted visiting politicians and trade union officials from Australia and other countries. Some of his Australian visitors included:

- Billy Snedden (then Cabinet Minister for Labour and National Services – they visited the Indomilk factory, Bogor Palace, Pasar Minggu technical training school, tea plantations, and held talks at the Department of Manpower);
- Bob Hawke (then President of the ACTU, who came on an eight-day visit as part of a six-man Labour Mission);
- George Polites (then Secretary of the Australian Council of Employer Federations);
- Dr Cook OBE (Head of the Department of Labour and National Service);
- Harry Hurrell (Assistant National Secretary of the Federated Iron Workers' Association);
- Gough Whitlam (then leader of the Federal Labour Party in opposition);
- Sir Reginald Schwarz (Minister for Civil Aviation);
- Ralph Marsh (Secretary of the Labour Council of NSW, a member of the Upper House, and Vice President of the ACTU); and
- Politicians Neil Brown (Diamond Valley) and Don Chip (Hotham).

One evening we were surprised when Gough Whitlam arrived unannounced, together with his secretary. Earlier that day, one of our children had had a birthday party, so, in addition to the usual cocktail hour food of frogs' legs and canapés, the guests feasted on left-over fairy bread and chocolate crackles.



Jim Wood and Billy Snedden at the Indomilk factory

It was one of my duties to take a number of these visitors shopping. In addition to Jim's responsibilities, he was sometimes the 'duty officer' for the week, which meant being on duty 24 hours each day in case urgent cable came in and need de-coding. It also entailed welcoming or farewelling people at the airport. Occasionally he represented the Embassy at other events, such as when Professor Herb Feith (from Monash University) came to give a lecture at a Quaker conference.



Djalan Thamrin, the main street in Djakarta, 1968

The Embassy was crucially important to us for several reasons: it had a canteen where we could buy food otherwise unavailable in Djakarta, a swimming pool where we spent a lot of time, and our mail which arrived from Canberra twice a week. Dr Houston, the embassy doctor, was essential for all those times our young children became sick after drinking the bath water.

In addition to his salary, Jim received an entertainment allowance which covered expenses for receptions, cocktail parties, dinners and luncheons. These took place in our home on a regular basis. To vary the format, sometimes we showed a film which the embassy received fortnightly. Two projectionists from the embassy would come to our home and show movies, such as 'The 39 Steps' or anything with Gregory Peck in it, to a group of friends and expats from other embassies.



Colleen and Jim at a cocktail party with Indonesian guests

The Ambassador's wife, Mrs Loveday, organised the wives of Embassy employees to visit a particular orphanage each week. The orphanage was situated in a kampong. All the children were barefoot, and many had scabies. We worked in groups of five, each person taking turns to do the shopping. We would mix powdered milk, Aktavite and sugar, and stand by while we watched the children drink it. Before leaving, we would leave a week's supply of eggs, fruit, vegetables, fish and soap, and sometimes took books and pencils. (These children had caste-iron stomachs, and could chew on hot chilli peppers. Someone later told me that after we left, the children would vomit up the Aktavite mixture, as it made them feel sick.)



Children at the orphanage

Each Christmas the Ambassador and his wife held a party for the Australian children at the residence. Father Christmas arrived by horse and cart, and there were pony rides.



Father Christmas at the ambassador's residence

Our house and servants

Our house was leased by the Australian Embassy in the southern suburb of Kebajoran at Prapantja Raya, Blok P V/1. The house was situated on a dirt road, on a corner block and at the top of a hill. It consisted of one and a half levels, with the lounge room at street level, and the dining room downstairs. On the opposite corner was a district office, which occasionally borrowed our iron. We had two bedrooms upstairs and the one bedroom downstairs had mould growing on the walls. The embassy was not allowed to spend any money preparing the house for us until after we arrived in the country, so it was months before we felt entirely comfortable. The standard of house depended on the husband's status, so our humble rating meant we had a concrete backyard with open drains frequented by rats.



Our house in Kebajoran

For the first few weeks we didn't have a shower fitted in the bathroom, so we had a 'mandi' instead. This meant you stood in the bathroom – a bare tiled room in which there was a large container of cold water and a plastic dipper. After you had soaped yourself all over, you then threw dippers full of cold water over yourself. In March 1969 a bath was installed. Later on, a kerosine heater was installed so we could have a shower, which was fine until one day there was a problem and the wooden shingles on the roof caught fire. This caused great excitement in the neighbourhood when the fire engine arrived. The toilets wouldn't work if the septic tank was full. The electricity was crucial for the water pump, air conditioning, etc. Black-outs were frequent. A blackout could last for up to three days if the transformer down the road was under two metres of water, especially in the rainy season.

Our house was six houses along from the local cemetery, which was the red-light area at night. After darkness fell, we could hear gamelan music coming from a nearby kampong. We quickly got used to the 'chit-chats' (geckos) which climbed the inside walls of the house and feasted on insects, but we were always repelled by the giant cockroaches which crawled up out of the plug-holes in the wash basins just as you were about to clean your teeth.



Gecko

There was also a 'tokay', a nocturnal lizard about eleven inches long, and which made a loud croaking sound. Outside our front gate was a betjak (becak) stand. A betjak was a pedicab, similar to a rickshaw. The driver pedalled a three-wheeled bicycle, and could take two passengers at a time. The drivers used our front fence as a urinal.



Betjak in Kebajoran

On the wall of our front verandah was a sign that the house belonged to the 'Kedutaan Besar Australie'. This sign was quickly removed when Yasser Arafat (then Chairman of the Palestinian Liberation Organisation) threatened to blow up the homes of Australians.

We were expected to employ six servants. Our team consisted of: Djojo, (a cook – known as Ibu = Mother), Misno (a Djongos or 'house-boy'), Parijam (a babu tjutji, who did the laundry), Suhaeni (a babu anak, who looked after the children), Suleman (a driver), and Hussein (a Djaga or night watchman). Two of them lived in rooms at the back of our outside kitchen, and the night watchman slept in the carport. Djojo had previously worked for an American family, so she excelled in making pumpkin pies, rhubarb pies and lemon meringue tarts. Djojo was adept at using the stove which operated on kerosine and which she called 'spiritus'. One of Suhaeni's other tasks was to clean the wash basins in the bedrooms. I remember one day chiding her for not being meticulous enough, when she instantly fell at my feet in distress. There were some changes of servants during the two years, but Djojo and Misno were with us for the whole two years.



Suleman, Hussein, Suhaeni and Djojo



Misno

Each fortnight the servants' wages were supplemented by a rice allowance provided by the embassy. If married, they received a double amount, and if unmarried, they received a single amount. One day the servants told me our Djaga was very sick. I had been annoyed with Hussein for claiming a double rice allowance when he was actually single. Dr Houston's advice was that the Djaga's family should take him to hospital. I visited the hospital and took an envelope of rupiah (cash) with me. Eventually I found a doctor who told me that Hussein was suffering from appendicitis and meningitis, and was paralysed from the neck down. Hussein was lying on a bare mattress with a waterproof cover. His girlfriend, who worked in the red-light area at the cemetery, was acting as his nurse. She slept on the concrete floor underneath the bed at night. When I spoke to Hussein, he said 'minta hidup', which means 'I want to live'. He died in September 1970. This episode was a profound lesson for me in judging others.

Every year, Indonesians observe Ramadan: a holy month of fasting from dawn to sunset. During this time the servants had less energy than usual. At the end of Ramadan they celebrate Lebaran (Idul Fitri), which included fireworks celebrations. Some made crackers from sections of bamboo filled with kerosine. One lad threw a cracker into an army jeep outside the Hotel Indonesia, so the soldier got out, and shot the young fellow, killing him instantly.

A visiting Portuguese group arrived in town to stage bull fights. One Indonesian climbed the fence. He was shot by the police, and his body was draped over the fence for all to see.

Corruption was rife at all levels of society. Unfortunately, there was no way around this. To acquire a driver's license, we attended police headquarters, each with a carton of Craven A cigarettes.

Travel within Indonesia

Jim was also expected to travel within Indonesia four times each year, sometimes to accompany the Ambassador (Max Loveday, followed by Gordon Jockel) or the Minister (Rawdon Dalrymple). He visited Makassar and Menado on the island of Sulawesi (the Celebes), Surabaya, a port in East Java, also Semarang, Salatiga, Magelang and Jogjakarta in central Java, which is the location of the Sultan's palace. When travelling with the Ambassador, they were treated as VIPs, were escorted by jeep and motor cycle escorts, and stayed at luxurious Governors' rest houses.

One day, Jim came home very excited. John Lovell (the Naval Attache) had organised a trip to Timor in a small plane, together with his wife Nancy, and invited us to accompany them. I had a premonition (violent shaking) during the night that we should not accept the invitation, so we didn't go, much to Jim's disappointment. When the plane reached Timor, there was a strong gust of wind and the plane tipped over. Nancy's neck was broken and she died on the spot.

We were very fortunate to be rostered every few weeks to spend a weekend at one of the embassy's bungalows in the mountains at Tugu. This meant driving for two hours up to the Puntjak Pass, where the climate was less oppressive. Here we were surrounded by rice paddies, tea plantations, bamboo which seemed to grow as you watched it, and water buffaloes. People could play badminton or tennis or swim in the pool.



Front garden of the Ambassador's bungalow in Tugu

At Christmas 1968, our kerosine stove at the bungalow went up in flames. The Assistant Trade Commissioner, who was staying with us, threw wet soil over the stove and put out the fire. We ate incinerated duck for dinner. At the bungalows, we awoke each morning to find groups of travelling salesmen had laid out their antiques for sale on the front verandah or lawn, ready for bartering. In the afternoons, first a few policemen and then two or three army personnel came calling, and were supplied with cigarettes. This was a friendly but subtle form of protection.



Travelling salesmen at one of the Tugu bungalows

One weekend we were invited to visit an Australian family in Bandung. The husband, George Hams, was re-designing the telecommunications network across Java, as part of the Colombo Plan. For us, this was a road trip of 156 kilometres, and would take at least three hours. Our daughter, Erica, was fine when we set out, but during the trip developed a high temperature, and was having hallucinations. When we reached Bandung, our friends suggested we took her to the nearby Seventh Day Adventist Hospital. They gave her an injection of Cortisone, which had an immediate effect, much to our relief.

On another weekend, in September 1970, we were invited to stay at a tea plantation at Tjiwideij (Ciwidey), about thirty kilometres further on from Bandung. As we arrived in the area after dark, and there were no street lights, let alone any signs, we decided to ask the way of any person we could find. Whenever I rolled the window down to ask, the person obviously thought he or she had seen a ghost, and took off. Somehow we managed to find the tea plantation. Tjiwideij is a beautiful spot situated near Mount Patuha, a volcano, with a sulphurous lake inside the crater. It is now a luxury resort. Each night the local people put on a different form of entertainment for us inside the tea factory, including dancing, singing and kick boxing. This weekend was also the 25th anniversary of Indonesian independence, and the local military celebrated by firing live ammunition into the air.



Derek at Tjiwideij



Erica at Tjiwideij

If you were travelling out of Djakarta, it was not a good idea to slow down too much at certain corners, because it would allow people to remove the hub caps from your car. At the next corner there would be a street stall selling used hub caps.

Some other aspects of life in Djakarta

Occasionally I went shopping at Sarinah's, the only department store in Djakarta, which had opened the year we arrived. More often I went shopping in the local pasar (market), where I had to bargain in Indonesian for every item. The rice always had to be sifted to remove as many weevils as possible. Djojo helped me buy steak from the 'haas' man who came to the house with his bicycle and weighing apparatus. As he strung up the hunk of steak for weighing, it was covered with flies. Occasionally there was great excitement when the Bandung man arrived. He had a truck full of fresh fruit and vegetables that he brought down from the mountains and parked in front of the house. Djojo would come rushing out to do the shopping, and to catch up with the news and gossip from the mountains.

One day I visited a batik factory, and was fascinated to watch as the women used boiling hot wax mixed with coconut oil in a device like a fountain pen to paint the patterns on the material. Then they would apply paint and wash the cloth. This procedure was repeated several times, depending on how many colours were involved in the finished product. Finally, they would put it into a solution to fix the colours.

Each Sunday we attended the Djakarta Community Church – an ecumenical Church with no regular minister, founded in 1953 by Rev. Prof. Richard Haskins, an American, who was a lecturer at the Djakarta Theological Seminary. Services were held in an Indonesian church building. Visiting preachers varied from Catholic priests to lay preachers, or whoever happened to be in town. The congregation was an international mixture which worshipped in the English language. Amongst the congregation we came into contact with many interesting people whom we would otherwise not have met. One couple we became friends with was from East Germany. Because East Germany was then behind the 'Iron Curtain', we were not supposed to talk to them. However, we exchanged visits with them at night, as their home was within the East German compound, a short walk from our home. We were surprised, when we returned from our mid-term leave in 1969, that they had defected and left us two little toy bears as a friendly 'thank you'.

We joined the Indonesia-Australia Friendship Association, and I joined the Women's International Club (WIC), where I learned to play bridge. As part of this I was asked to be responsible for an English conversation group of about a dozen Indonesian women married to high-ranking men, such as the Attorney-General. Indonesian society then consisted of the very rich and the extremely poor. One of these ladies showed me her home, which consisted of two double-storey houses standing side by side on the same property. At the conversation group the ladies would take it in turns to prepare a talk on a topic of Indonesian culture, e.g. wedding ceremonies.

We met up with Leprosy missionaries from India and Australia. One of the Australian families came to lunch. The wife was recovering from encephalitis, and I noticed that one of their daughters was covered in heat rash, which is very painful. One day I visited the Leprosy Mission hospital, together with a group of Australian wives. There were about 250 patients, some of whom were cured, but could not return to their homes because their families would not accept them.

We met many other interesting people, including the young Blanche D'Alpuget. She was then married to Tony Pratt, who worked at the Embassy. She later married Bob Hawke. Another interesting person was the young Mike Carlton, then the ABC radio representative. He used to spend a lot of time at the embassy pool. We also got to know the Qantas personnel, who lived in a compound which included badminton courts. Regular competitions were held here.

Basil Teasey was the Consul. He was a larger-than-life fellow with a great sense of fun. He organised the Melbourne Cup celebration at the embassy pool, and the annual betjak races, which took place around a large square in front of his house. Basil hired six or more betjaks, and member of the embassy staff were 'volunteered' to pedal them. There were the inevitable accidents, as the betjaks were difficult to steer, and some ended up in ditches.

Beggars were everywhere. One day I was shopping in Pasar Baru, when I came across a man who was on the ground and bent over. He looked to be in a terrible physical state, and was holding a begging bowl. I put some money into his bowl, and was taken aback when he instantly stood up and laughed at me.

Conclusion

Indonesia would be a very different place now. Our two years in Indonesia was a 'Baptism by fire' in many respects, but a tremendous experience, and one I wouldn't have missed.



Billy Snedden (centre) and Jim Wood at Pasar Minggu Technical Training School, 10 July 1970



Erica and Derek at Tanjung Priok (the sign says: Bathing limit in the sea 100 metres from the beach)

Aged and Carer Services – St Mark’s

*Social Support Program for people over the age of 65 years living
in Eastern Metropolitan Melbourne*

St Mark’s has been serving the City of Monash community members for more than 30 years. Previously under Wesley Mission after a merger in 2018 with 21 other organisations and currently under Uniting Vic Tas as “Uniting St Mark’s”, it is proud of its achievements in supporting the community over the years. As you know St Mark’s is known in the community for its high-quality social support programs, the care we provide, our friendly qualified staff, secure safe environment and for helping participants to achieve their goals.

You may be aware the community aged-care sector is constantly changing. In 2019 the Commonwealth Home Support Program funding requirement and participant eligibility criteria to attend programs such as St Mark’s, changed.

Anyone who would like to attend aged care programs has to register with the My Aged Care on **1800 200 422** and has to inform them that they would like to attend specific programs such as St Mark’s, for social support.

Although a person holding a home care package is not eligible to attend the program as a new participant, after joining the program a participant is eligible to apply for a home care package. Participants must be entry level clients (less dependent) to enjoy the flexible programs on offer and achieve their goals.

Due to these changes in the aged care sector referral process and the COVID 19 pandemic, St Mark’s has less new participants joining the program. As past and present program participants you know about St Mark’s high quality social support programs and the care we provide, hence our staff thought you would be the best ambassadors to promote the services amongst your friends and family who are in need of social support. We offer a range of activities and tailor the programs according to each person’s needs, goals, capabilities and interests. We provide morning tea, a home-cooked lunch and are happy to transport people who requires transportation.

I am inviting you to join the programs with your family and friends or to share the information with someone you know who would be interested in a Social Support program.

If you have any questions please don’t hesitate to contact me.

May I take this opportunity to thank you all so much for your help and support in promoting the programs.

Ethan Gankanda, Team Leader,

*St Mark’s Planned Activity Group & Respite Cottage –
Eastern Region/Victoria*

7 Edward Street, Chadstone, Victoria 3148

(03) 9051 9161, 0402 386 609

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St Luke's Luncheon

Some members of St Luke's recently enjoyed lunch together at the Wheelers Hill Hotel.



Birthday Celebration

On Sunday 12 December we celebrated St Luke's birthday along with all members of the congregation who have had 'special birthdays' this year.

Congratulations to you all!



St Luke's Managers' Door Roster 2022

2022

Team Members

JANUARY	David Langley	Ann Langley	Eunice Magee
FEBRUARY	Heather Spurling	Tom Spurling	Rena Douglas
MARCH	Ros Faichney	Gavin Faichney	Byron Savory
APRIL 3rd & 10th	Scilla Lucas	Tony Lucas	Corrie Symington
APRIL 17th & 24th	Rosemary Brown	Bill Brown	Corrie Symington
MAY	Geoff Brien	Gay Taylor	Alan Taylor
JUNE	John Sale	Jean Sale	Rennus Crossley
JULY	Barbara Fowler	Clair Kendall	Lois Brown
AUGUST	Wendy Born	Geoff Swan	
SEPTEMBER	Scilla Lucas	Tony Lucas	Alison Douglas
OCTOBER	David Langley	Ann Langley	Eunice Magee
NOVEMBER	Heather Spurling	Tom Spurling	Rena Douglas
DECEMBER	Ros Faichney	Gavin Faichney	Byron Savory

For more information, please speak to Scilla Lucas, 0438 988 927.

SAMMY STAMP

Allan Clark has reported that a volunteer found a block of four commemorative 'Cinderella's' (non-postage stamps or labels) among a container of donated stamps. After sending them to an Auction House, Sammy Stamp received \$1250.50 after commission. Amazing what can be found among bags or containers of new or used stamps.

So far this year sales had reached \$34,010 up to 7th October.

Please keep collecting them from anyone you can and bring them to church or let Lois Brown know and she will arrange to get them. It's such a great way to raise funds to assist many small projects local and overseas instead of throwing them out.

Lois Brown

Thank you

Thank you to all who have contributed to the Messenger throughout the year.

