

# INTERACT

Quarterly

*He is Risen*

DEATH COULD NOT HOLD HIM.

Rejoice in the resurrection of

*Jesus Christ.*



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MATTHEW 28

## Endeavour Hills Uniting Church Mission Statement

The Endeavour Hills Uniting Church...

a worshipping, nurturing, learning community...

an open door, reaching out to show Christ's face to all.

'Together We Grow.'



# ENDEAVOUR HILLS UNITING CHURCH

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The Endeavour Hills Uniting Church web site maintenance is overseen by Church Council. Please send all correspondence etc. to the Secretary, Judy Hopkins.

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Please note:

The views in the articles included in this publication are not necessarily those held by the Endeavour Hills Uniting Church.

## FROM THE MINISTER



This edition of Interact finds us on the journey through Lent towards Easter. During my readings, I learnt a Chinese character that I want to introduce you to. Chinese characters are probably the most beautiful and difficult to understand and learn. Each character

忙

corresponds to a spoken syllable with a basic meaning. Many words combine two or more characters to express an idea that is different from the original words used to create it. The Chinese character for the word “busy” is written by combining the characters for “heart” and “dead.” Consider that when we are overly busy, we lay the foundation for a lifeless heart. How many are at risk of having a lifeless heart — a heart made dry through the pressures and challenges of life? Can I challenge and encourage us to take a heart check during Lent?

Traditionally Lent represents the time Jesus was led into the desert by the Spirit, tempted by Satan and a time of preparation for ministry. Lent is marked by repentance, fasting and preparation for Easter. As we take a heart check, I pray that the Holy Spirit will bring life to our weary, hurting and broken hearts. In the same way that God breathed life into dead and dry bones in a vast valley in Ezekiel 37, may the breath of God breathe into your hearts, bringing forth new life, hope and passion for Christ and the church. May we cease from the relentless busyness of life and take time to rejoice in the wonderful and glorious truth that Christ has saved us from our sins.

*Rev. Robin Yang*

# BRAINWASHED BY THE DOLLAR

In the first week of January, not yet Epiphany Sunday, already in our supermarket there was a display of hot cross buns, and in shops at our nearest shopping centre, Easter eggs!



Whatever happened to Christmas? And the meaning of Easter? A few dollars purchase items that may not be the best for our health. There is no hint at the meaning of Christmas or Easter. Commerce wins the day. It is so easy to indoctrinate young minds with clever sales pitch.

Our granddaughter rang in desperate search for a book about the real story of Christmas, relevant for a four-year-old. Her daughter believes Christmas is all about presents. Somehow all of us have been wrong-footed by the barrage of media ads that border on paganism. Possessions have become gods.

All of us brought up with Christian beliefs and values need to give our utmost support to those who care for our children through Messy Church, Sunday Schools, youth groups and religious education in schools. We can do this through prayer and financial help.

We need to be more than spectators. We need to live the stories of Christmas and Easter by example in word and daily life. We need to take on the pressures of commercialism, and redirect our focus, to put Christ back into our celebrations.

**Reflection:** For God loved the world so much that he gave his only son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life.

John witnesses to the greatest gift of all. If we give thanks for that, then the kind gifts and delights of Christmas and Easter will have their proper perspective.

**Bill Pugh**

# LENT IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Lent is the period of 40 days which comes before Easter in the Christian calendar. Beginning on Ash Wednesday, Lent is a season of reflection and preparation before the celebrations of Easter. By observing the 40 days of Lent, Christians replicate Jesus Christ's sacrifice and withdrawal into the desert for 40 days. Lent is marked by fasting, both from food and festivities.

Whereas Easter celebrates the resurrection of Jesus after his death on the cross, Lent recalls the events leading up to and including Jesus' crucifixion. This is believed to have taken place in Roman occupied Jerusalem.

The Christian churches that observe Lent in the 21st century (and not all do significantly) use it as a time for prayer and penance. Only a small number of people today fast for the whole of Lent, although some maintain the practice on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. It is more common these days for believers to surrender a particular vice such as favourite foods or smoking. Whatever the sacrifice it is a reflection of Jesus' deprivation in the wilderness and a test of self-discipline.

Why 40 days?

40 is a significant number in Jewish-Christian scripture:

In Genesis, the flood which destroyed the earth was brought about by 40 days and nights of rain.

The Hebrews spent 40 years in the wilderness before reaching the land promised to them by God.

Moses fasted for 40 days before receiving the ten commandments on Mount Sinai.

Jesus spent 40 days fasting in the wilderness in preparation for his ministry.

Most Christians regard Jesus' time in the wilderness as the key event for the duration of Lent.

*(Continued on page 6)*

# ASHES TO ASHES

In the Hebrew Scriptures we read stories of people putting on sackcloth and sitting in ashes as a symbolic act of repentance. This was one of the major ways of saying “I’m sorry” to God, and indicating a desire to turn one’s life around. While we may not do this particular practice today, a glimpse of it occurs with the beginning of Lent, and the observance of Ash Wednesday (February 14, 2018).



The season of Lent is often a time of renewing our spirits, of trying to get a little closer to God. An excellent way to begin that process is by acknowledging what we have done that distances us from God and making a commitment to change. That is the gift of this Lenten season, and one of the symbols of Ash Wednesday: a reminder that we can start again, a reminder that no matter where we have journeyed, we can always turn and re-focus our attention on God’s way.

*(Continued from page 5)*

## **Lent in the 21st Century**

### **Why is it called Lent?**

Lent is an old English word meaning 'lengthen'. In the Northern Hemisphere, Lent is observed in spring, when the days begin to get longer.

### **The colour purple**

Purple is the symbolic colour used in some churches throughout Lent, for drapes and altar frontals.

Purple is used for two reasons: firstly because it is associated with mourning and so anticipates the pain and suffering of the crucifixion, and secondly because purple is the colour associated with royalty, and celebrates Christ's resurrection and sovereignty.

The last week of Lent is called **Holy Week**.

# GUERRILLA GRATEFULNESS

Our church's plumbago, in a raised feature bed, was rampaging out of control. Mowing the lawns, I would eye it off for action and then run out of steam. Suddenly, one Sunday it was gone and the next day some lovely new plants were enjoying being admired by the arriving congregants.



Later, along came some mulch and the bed was picture-perfect. "It wasn't me," was my response to the enquiring. A 'guerrilla gardener' had been at work. You know the signs. The dust under the pews disappears or the silverware is polished. The kitchen cupboards have a wipe out and tidy up. Cobwebs vanish, hymnbooks are straightened, light bulbs are changed and noticeboards updated. Guerrillas are at work. Perhaps you are one. I, for one, am grateful for such quiet thoughtfulness.

## Reflection

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10

*Ian Menzies*

# WHO'S GOT THE BODY?

Who cares? What difference does it make if Jesus rose from the dead? It makes all the difference in the world. If Christ did not rise, then thousands of Christians have lived and died for a hoax.

If, however, He did rise, then He is still alive and can act now to straighten out our chaotic world. Facts always speak louder than opinions. Let's take a look at some of the historical evidence for the resurrection and see where the facts lead.



One preliminary consideration: countless scholars--among them, the apostle Paul, St. Augustine, Sir Isaac Newton and C. S. Lewis--believed in the resurrection. We need not fear committing intellectual suicide by accepting it also.

Paul wrote that Christ died for our sins, He was buried, He was raised on the third day. He appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. After that, He appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time.

Consider also these four pieces of evidence:

## 1. The Explosive Growth of the Christian Church.

Within a few weeks after the crucifixion a movement arose which, by the later admission of its enemies, "upset the world". Something happened to ignite this movement a very short time after its leader had been executed. What was it?

## 2. The Changed Lives of the Disciples.

After Jesus' arrest and crucifixion, most of the disciples were frightened. Peter, for instance, denied Christ **three times (twice to two servant girls!)**. Yet 10 out of the 11 disciples were martyred for their faith. Peter was crucified upside down; Thomas was skewered; John was boiled in oil but survived. Something had happened to revolutionize these men's lives. Each believed he had seen the risen Christ.

*(Continued on page 9)*

*(Continued from page 8)*

## **Who's Got the Body?**

### **3. The Empty Tomb.**

Jesus' dead body was removed from the cross, wrapped in graveclothes like a mummy, covered with 100 pounds of aromatic spices and placed in a tomb. The tomb had been hewn out of rock and apparently contained only one cavern. An extremely large stone was rolled into a slightly depressed groove at the tomb's entrance. Some have conservatively estimated the weight of the stone at one-and-a-half to two tons.

A crack "Green Beret" unit of Roman soldiers was placed out front to guard the grave. The military discipline of the Romans was so strict that severe corporal and often capital punishment awaited the soldier who left his post or failed in his duty. On Sunday morning, the stone was found rolled away, the body was gone, but the graveclothes were still in place. What happened?

Some say that Christ's friends stole the body. This means that either one of the women sweet-talked the guards while the other two moved the stone and tip-toed off with the body, or else guys like Peter (remember how 'brave' he was) and Thomas (remember how easily convinced he was) overpowered the guards, stole the body, and fabricated a myth.

These theories hardly seem plausible. The guard was too powerful, the stone too heavy, and the disciples, not yet experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit, were too spineless to attempt such a feat.

Others say that Christ's enemies stole the body. Yet if the Romans or Jews had the body, they would have exposed it publicly and Christianity would have died out. They didn't and it didn't.

Then there is the "swoon theory," that Christ didn't really die but was only unconscious. The expert Roman executioners merely thought He was dead. After a few days in the tomb, without food or medicine, the cool air revived Him. Then, according to this theory, He burst from the 100 pounds of graveclothes, rolled away the stone with His nail-pierced hands, scared the daylights out of the Roman soldiers,

*(Continued on page 10)*

*(Continued from page 9)*

## **Who's Got the Body?**

walked miles on wounded feet, and convinced His disciples that He'd been raised from the dead. This one is harder to believe than the resurrection itself. In other words, if Jesus was put to death, who's got the body? All that we do have is an empty tomb.

### **4. The Appearances of the Risen Christ.**

For 40 days after His death, Christ was reported to be seen alive on earth. Some say these were hallucinations, but do the accounts show that? Only certain high-strung and imaginative types of people usually have such psychic experiences. Yet a woman, a stubborn tax collector, several fisherman and more than 500 people at one time claimed they saw Him. Hallucinations are very individualistic--contrasting with the fact that over 500 people saw the same thing at the same time and place.

Two other facts undermine the hallucination idea. Such imaginations are usually of expected events, yet the disciples had lost hope after the crucifixion. Also, psychic phenomena usually occur in cycles, but the appearances came in no set pattern. Attempts to explain away the appearances run into a brick wall of facts. The facts point to one conclusion: Christ is risen.

The above does not constitute an exhaustive proof, but rather a reasoned examination of the evidence. We must each consider and evaluate the evidence ourselves to determine the truth of the resurrection claim. (Of course, the truth or falsity of the resurrection is a matter of historical fact and is not dependent on any individual's belief.) If the facts support the claim, then we can conclude that He arose. In any case, a mere intellectual assent to the facts does nothing for one's life.

A major evidence comes experientially, in personally receiving Christ as Saviour and Lord. Jesus said, "Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any one hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him." Care to give Him a try?

# SAVING OUR WILDLIFE



On a sunny late autumn day, four of us set off for a visit to Healesville Sanctuary—a very pleasant drive through large areas of golden grape vines, and then through the tree-lined streets of Healesville.

Arriving at the sanctuary we could hear kookaburras laughing as hard and as loud as possible. Magpies

tried to compete with them, but it was a losing battle.

The very sleepy koalas are always a popular attraction, particularly to guests from overseas. The keepers were busy re-stocking fresh gum leaves for the next koala meal.

A walk along the paths brought us to an enclosure that housed a number of threatened bird species. What a privilege to see these birds at close quarters. The inquisitive curlews with their thin dainty legs, peeping around rocks to see us, the intruders. It is wonderful to see these birds thriving in this protected area, and hopefully in the wild once released.

If only everyone cared for the natural beauty that surrounds us, the sanctuary may not really be needed. How wonderful it would be to see all creatures in their own natural environment.

**Reflection:** “Give yourself the rest you need. When you are walking alone, listen to the sermon preached by the flowers, the trees, the shrubs, the sky, the sun and the whole world.

Notice how they preach to you a sermon of love, of praise of God, and how they invite you to proclaim the greatness of the One who has given them being.” *St John of the Cross*

*Janet Soo*

# POSITIONS ON THE FIELD



These days, team members often have to play in several positions. Reserves have to be ready to fill a gap. So forwards become backs and cricketers may be asked to bowl and bat too, with a real place for all-rounders.

Sometimes we are blessed to have all-rounders in our church team. In our little church in the Otways, Les was an important all-rounder, a retired farmer and fisherman. He lived near the church, so he was on-hand. Opening the church on Sundays, turning on the heaters. Welcoming visitors at the door and giving out the books. He sat near the back so he could be ready to show latecomers a seat.

He was an organiser of working bees and brought his trailer to work. He was a great support at funerals, liaising with undertakers, opening the church facilities and ensuring parking space for vehicles. He also knew many of the relatives of the deceased.

On Saturdays he helped set up our stall in the street and did much of the heavy lifting. He also encouraged others to assist.

Nothing was a trouble for this all-rounder. He did not preach. No need to— his life was a sermon. Les has passed on but he has left a legacy of inspired, humble, cheerful, Christian service. Surely, there will be a role for his talents in the Master's Kingdom.

**Reflection:** Luke 10:2 - He said to them, "There is a large harvest, but few workers to gather it in. Pray to the owner of the harvest that he will send out workers to gather in his harvest."

What message could this have for the mission of the church today?  
Your church?

*Bill Pugh*

# PENTECOST SUNDAY: THE COMING OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

Pentecost Sunday is one of the most ancient feasts of the Church, celebrated early enough to be mentioned in the Acts of the Apostles (20:16) and Saint Paul's



First Letter to the Corinthians (16:8). Pentecost is celebrated on the 50th day after Easter (if we count both Easter Sunday and Pentecost Sunday), and it supplants the Jewish feast of Pentecost, which took place 50 days after the Passover and celebrated the sealing of the Old Covenant on Mount Sinai.

## Quick Facts

Date: Fifty days after Easter Sunday.

Type of Feast: Solemnity.

Readings: Acts 2:1-11; Psalm 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34; 1 Corinthians 12:3b-7, 12-13, or Galatians 5:16-25; John 20:19-23 or John 15:26-27; 16:12-15.

## The History of Pentecost Sunday

The Acts of the Apostles recounts the story of the original Pentecost Sunday (Acts 2). Jews "from every nation under heaven" (Acts 2:5) were gathered in Jerusalem to celebrate the Jewish feast of Pentecost. On that Sunday, ten days after the Ascension of Our Lord,

*(Continued on page 14)*

*(Continued from page 13)*

## **Pentecost Sunday**

Apostles and the Blessed Virgin Mary were gathered in the Upper Room, where they had seen Christ after His Resurrection:

*And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. [ Acts 2:2-4]*

Christ had promised His Apostles that He would send His Holy Spirit, and, on Pentecost, they were granted the gifts of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles began to preach the Gospel in all of the languages that the Jews who were gathered there spoke, and about 3,000 people were converted and baptized that day.

## **The Birthday of the Church**

That is why Pentecost is often called "the birthday of the Church." On Pentecost Sunday, with the descent of the Holy Spirit, Christ's mission is completed, and the New Covenant is inaugurated. It's interesting to note that Saint Peter, the first pope, was already the leader and spokesman for the Apostles on Pentecost Sunday (see Acts 2:14ff).

In years past, Pentecost was celebrated with greater solemnity than it is today. In fact, the entire period between Easter and Pentecost Sunday was known as Pentecost (and it still is called Pentecost in the Eastern churches, both Catholic and Orthodox). During those 50 days, both fasting and kneeling were strictly forbidden, because this period was supposed to give us a foretaste of the life of Heaven. In more recent times, parishes celebrated the approach of Pentecost with the public recitation of the Novena to the Holy Ghost.

# A STARRY NIGHT



We were on a viewing platform under a clear sky at Uluru. A resident astronomer decoded the Southern Cross, the signs of the zodiac and the Milky Way as we gazed in wonder. There were many more twinkling lights in the heavens. So many that the eye could not see, with many more undiscovered, light years away. Our eyes and minds could take no more.

We sat in silence and marvelled. My thoughts turned to Psalm 8.

“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and stars which you have set in place, what are human beings that you are mindful of them, mortals that you care for them?”

What is more, we are a little lower than the angels in the scheme of things. And we are honoured to be made in his image, called to be responsible carers of the earth, seas and all creatures he has made.

Our response is surely, in wonder, thanksgiving and praise, to say, “O Lord, our Sovereign, how majestic is your name in all the earth!”

Reflection: In quietness take time to ponder what it means to consider God’s creative work, as noted in Psalm 8.

*Bill Pugh*

## Contributions to Interact

Any material you may have to be included in Interact may be sent in one of two ways:

1. e-mail (preferred method) to [interact@ehuc.org.au](mailto:interact@ehuc.org.au) putting "Interact" in the subject line
2. leave in the green Interact folder which is located on the stand to the right of the kitchen window.

Your contributions of up to **450 words** are very welcome, **BUT please include your name, phone number &/or email address in case it is necessary to contact you.** Material should be submitted by **12 noon** on the deadline dates indicated below:

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Winter	20th May 2018	3rd June 2018
Spring	19th August 2018	2nd September 2018
Summer	18th November 2018	2nd December 2018