



*We reach up to God, reach in to
one another and reach out to the
community*

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Black White and shades of Grey

Have you ever noticed how, when you have conversation about a controversial figure, most of us have a tendency to see them as either black or as white – as either completely abhorrent and dreadful, or as a paragon of all virtues?

Think, for example, about the former President, Donald Trump. Not only in the United States of America, but pretty much across the world, people were polarized into two camps. Trump was either the best president the US had had in generations, reforming, paring or eliminating sclerotic government agencies and revitalizing the economy through finally putting American interests first; or he was evil incarnate, a buffoon, a wrecker and a moral reprobate. There was nothing in between the two extremes.

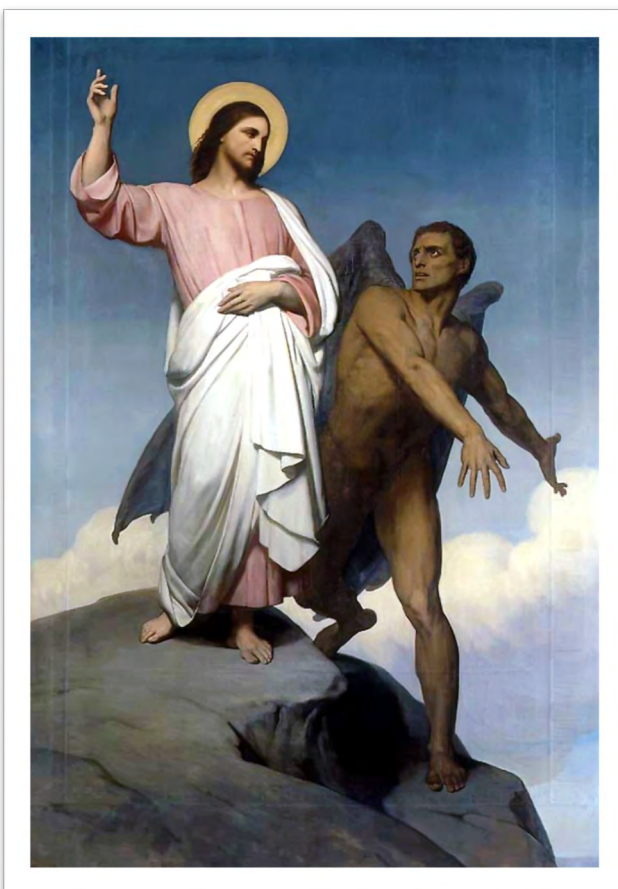
We tend to try to reduce the world to simple blacks and whites as a coping mechanism. The world is an extremely complex place, and conceiving of it in simple terms helps us try to make sense of it. Putting everyone, and everything, into one of two camps saves us a lot of careful consideration, and a lot of time wrestling with ambiguity and ambivalence.

There is a strong strain of that kind of thinking in some Christian theology. Some Christians see the world as torn between God, who is wholly good, and “Satan” who is wholly bad. Biblical passages such as the apocalyptic Revelation reflect that kind of thinking, suggesting that there is a cosmic battle happening between good and evil.

That idea was not native to the Hebrew people. It infiltrated Jewish thinking at the time of the Babylonian captivity in the 6th century BC, when the exiles encountered Persian ideas in Babylon. The Persian saw the cosmos as the staging ground for an eternal battle between two completely equal forces, Good and Evil. That notion is called Dualism. When Dualism found its way into Jewish thinking, of course God was identified with the Good force. The Hebrew word *satan* (no capital) meant “adversary”, so *God’s* adversary, the force for Evil,

became personalized as “Satan”. Some sections of Judaism took on a dualistic worldview, though with the important difference that God was conceived of as more powerful than Satan; God would eventually defeat the power of evil.

It’s not hard then to see how that idea came into sections of Christianity, though it has hardly served us well! Here is not the place to explore the many reasons why that is so, but one important one is that while we have some metaphysical being to blame for the bad things we do, we have an easy out for our personal responsibility. Not my fault – Satan made me do it!



The point is, however, that our lazy way of viewing the world in simple blacks and whites is rooted deeply in the Judaeo-Christian culture we have inherited. The trouble is that blacks and whites really don’t work in dealing with the real world or with each other. The world isn’t black and white, but is comprised mostly of a lot of grey. If we return to the example of Donald Trump, regarding him as entirely black, as having presided over legislation and administrative acts that were entirely bad and wrong, then we have trouble explaining why his nemesis, President Joe Biden, has maintained a number of Trump’s policies and initiatives. How can that be, if they were, by definition, all bad?

Or to take another example closer to home, most Australians either loved or loathed Julia Gillard as Prime Minister. Those who loathed her and saw her as a hopeless leader stumble over milestone policies such as the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) which is recognized as an important step forward for the nation. So too do they have trouble accepting that this allegedly flawed human being is still remembered as one of the kindest and most thoughtful people to occupy the prime ministerial suite.

These dissonances are reminders that our world cannot be cast in simple tones of black and white. While simplicity may be easy, it is fatally flawed. It provides a grotesquely distorted picture of the world that will lead us badly astray when important judgments need to be made. Life cannot be lived like that.

As human beings, we are complex creatures. None of us can ever conform to the label of black or white, of being purely bad or purely evil. Even the men who manned the gas chambers in Nazi concentration camps mostly went home to loving families where they nurtured their children and were kind to their pets. Nor can the moral complex issues we face usually be reduced to simple answers. When I heard a former alcoholic, and now high ranking academic, say that he would always give some money to a street person, even if it were used to buy liquor or drugs, because at least the person would have a greater chance of surviving into another day when their life might still be turned around, I had to stop and think about my own “righteous” refusal to act in the same way.

The same moral ambiguity surrounds questions like the “Safe Injecting Room” overseen by Uniting, and same-sex marriage. Who could ever honestly say that they had a monopoly on righteousness in such difficult and challenging issues?

The fact is that the world mostly consists of many shades of grey. It is populated by moral ambiguity and hard choices. Life is not simple. People are not simple. If we are to engage meaningfully with the world, we must be prepared to engage with that ambiguity and complexity. So what on earth does this have to do with Easter, which has now come upon us?

One of the powerful metaphors of Christianity is that Christ is the light that has come into the world, and that the darkness will never overcome that light. You’ll recognize the dualism in that way of thinking. So we tend to characterise Good Friday as the day of darkness, the temporary victory of evil, and Easter Sunday as the day of triumphant light, when the forces of God defeat the power of evil. And in fact that can be a very helpful and powerful way of conceiving of Easter.

However we ought not to be misled by our own metaphor. The light that came into the world illuminated the world as it truly is, reaching into its darkest corners and exposing their secrets and hidden rites. Jesus allowed us to see the world as it really is.

The picture that emerged was precisely that of moral ambiguity. The truth that was revealed cannot be conveyed in stark tones of black and white, but involves those endless shades of grey. Jesus recognised that the world was ambiguous and complex.

Two encounters out of the innumerable ones that Jesus had will suffice to make the point. Both happen to come from John’s gospel.

In John 8:3-11 we meet the “woman caught in adultery”. The “scribes and Pharisees” who brought the woman to Jesus were ready to condemn her, which would involve her being stoned to death. The story is morally ambiguous from the start: why was only the woman accused, and the man involved apparently regarded as blameless? Jesus makes no specific mention of that fact, however; instead, he calls out the self-righteousness of the accusers. “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her,” he challenges them. The fact that they slunk away bespoke the fact that their simple construct of black (the woman) and white (themselves) had failed a simple test. Jesus also highlighted the good within the woman by overlooking her action and trusting in her to avoid the same sin in the future.



Jesus’ encounter with the “woman at the

well” (John 4:4-42) tells a very similar story. Again the story is morally ambiguous from the beginning. The woman has been married five times, and is now living with a man to whom she is not married. On the surface, her character appears to be questionable. However, assuming that the Samaritans followed the Mosaic Law, only a man could initiate a divorce. If we realise that fact, the woman becomes the tragic victim of serially uncaring and unloving men. Her “sin” of living with a man who was not her

Life Streams Event

Hurstville Uniting Church 19 March 2021

It was a nice evening as I gather my lot and head out to the Hurstville UC, located on The Avenue, just across from Hurstville Westfield shopping centre. I am quite familiar with this street as my eldest daughter used to attend Danebank school located at the other end of The Avenue. Also, our family frequent Westfield at Hurstville for shopping, especially at Christmas time.



husband, while technically a breach of the Law, could have been her last attempt to find the love and intimacy that all humans need. So, while Jesus reveals his knowledge of her past, we should not read it as condemnation; it could just as easily be an expression of sympathy for the heartbreaking life she had led. There is no instruction to leave her current partner. And to the astonishment of the disciples, Jesus engages with this woman in a deep conversation about true worship. This is not, as so often conveyed, a story of Jesus condemning but forgiving a sinful woman, but of Jesus recognising and acknowledging the pain, complexity and ambiguity of real life lived by real people.

My personal resolution for this Easter is to reconceive of the Easter story. The triumph of the resurrection is, of course, what we celebrate; but rather than regard it “merely” as the ultimate victory of good over bad, of life over death – although it is certainly that – perhaps this Easter we should focus on the fact that the new life that is revealed in Jesus Christ does away with simple notions of good and bad, white and black, and shines its light into the reality, the complexity and the ambiguity of human existence, not in righteousness, but in compassion, love and grace. For Jesus came to us, Jesus died for us, and Jesus loves us in all our myriad shades of grey.

Alan Harper OAM

This evening’s event was organised by the Life Streams team. This is a team setup by the Georges River Presbytery to facilitate and support youth groups in the area to enable growth via combined events and collaborations between youths groups.

We found parking inside the church carpark and we proceed to the church building. Although I have seen this church multiple times in the last 25 years since I moved into the area, I have never visited or entered this property. It is quite deceptive looking from the outside as upon entering the church, it was quite big. I also noticed a very nice feature of the church. A Pipe organ is at the back although I suspect that this used to be the front of the church in the past years. However, I don’t think that the organ has been used for a long time. The cost of maintaining such a wonderful

piece of musical equipment is very prohibitive. On top of that, a very competent organist is required to play this piece of equipment to fully appreciate its capability.

There were only about fifteen people present when we arrived. Yet within 30 minutes, the number swelled to over 70, mainly youth with some youth mentors and a few parents. The evening started with some games to break the ice and get the youth to know each other.

This was followed by Devotion, led by Rev Dr Matagi Vilitama. He emphasised the importance of walking with God. The youth should not be afraid or ashamed of being Christians and letting people know of their faith. Rev Dr Matagi Vilitama also spoke of the dream and possibility of growing the youth in the Georges River Presbytery so that future meetings will be held in bigger venues like the Hurstville Civic Centre which can hold up to 1000 people.



The next part of the evening was a Tik Tok dance competition. The youth present were divided into four groups and they choose one of the 5 songs presented to dance to.

The parents and youth mentors also took part and had their own group, with some rather hilarious results.

Later that evening, everyone shared in singing of some contemporary and modern songs. Three of the youth leaders sang acapella beautifully, to teach a song for the youth to sing that evening. One of the youth mentors then closed the evening with a prayer.

Everyone then adjourned to the hall for some healthy light refreshments and water before saying their farewells and departing for their homes.

Overall it was a successful evening and commendation to the Life Stream team for this initiative which was well received by all of those who attended. My only regret and concern is that of the more than 70 people present that evening, only 4 were not of Pacific Islander origin.

Through hard work, prayer, faith, and an open invitation,

I dared to dream that God will bring forth many of the other youth of Caucasian background to be part of this essential ministry to sustain the life of not just the Uniting Church of Australia, but the wider church.

**Ese Enari – Youth mentor,
St Andrews Brighton UIC**



THE NEW CHURCH TO 2005

the 80th anniversary of St Andrew's

(Transcribed and edited from the booklet produced for the anniversary)

At the time of the building of the new church, the Student in Charge was Mr William M Walker B.A., followed by (another) William Walker, Home Missionary, who had been appointed on 11th September 1938. (Pam Scofield's grandfather). Unfortunately he was only there for a few months, dying of a burst appendix. The Foundation Stone of the new Church was laid on 8th October 1938. The builder was Mr R G Vale, 303 Maroubra Bay Road, Maroubra and the architect was Mr G B Gray, 63 Cottenham Ave, Kingsford.

The new church was dedicated on Saturday 10th December 1938 at 3.45pm. The Sermon was given by Rev R G M^cConnochie M.A. (West Parish Church, Airdrie, Scotland). The service was followed by a High Tea in the School Hall at 5.30pm and a Recital of Sacred and Classical Music at 7.30pm. Also during 1938, Miss Marie Percival (Charles Schofield's Aunt) was appointed the Sunday School Superintendent. In 1939, the first couple to be married in the new church were Mr Arthur Bernard Crisp and Miss Ruth Jessie Walker (Pam Schofield's parents), the daughter of Mrs Maud Walker and the late Rev William Walker, who had died the previous year.



On 10th September 1946, St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Brighton-le-Sands, was raised to Sanctioned Charge Status and a Call was given to Rev. David A Ryrie. On 23rd January 1947, having accepted the Call, Rev Ryrie was inducted as the first ordained Minister of the church.

A house on the corner of Princess Street and Francis Avenue, Brighton-le-Sands, was purchased in 1948 as the first manse. This house still stands and is a daycare centre. Three years later, in 1951, it was decided to sell this Manse and buy another closer to the church. The second Manse was at 44 Queens Road, Brighton-le-Sands. By 1960, many home units were being erected in the Brighton-le-Sands area and older properties were at a premium. Rev H A Harris consulted with Messrs Jones & Morris builders and eventually sold the Queens Road Manse, with part of the agreement being that the builder would erect a new church hall at a cut price. A twelve year old house at 32 Trafalgar Street (corner of Kings Road) was purchased as the church's third Manse. In these two astute movements of the

Manse and the hall (worth more than what was paid), the Property Capital Investment of the church was increased by about £14,000. At the same time, the congregation raised the minister's stipend to the Basic Stipend, as set by the church, to £1,376. Thus Brighton-le-Sands, in one year, became a most desirable Charge in the Presbytery, with all facilities for the work of the Ministry.

In 1969, the Clouston Memorial Presbyterian Church on the corner of, now, Princes Highway and Forest Road, Arncliffe closed and the congregation amalgamated with St Andrew's at Brighton-le-Sands.



Wednesday 22nd June 1977, brought a big change in the life of the congregation at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church. The congregation had previously agreed to become part of the Uniting Church in Australia. The constitutions of the three denominations meant that the Methodist Church was completely taken up in the Uniting Church but each congregation in the Presbyterian and Congregational Churches made individual decisions. On this day, the Service of Inauguration of the Uniting Church in Australia took place in the Sydney Town Hall. Rev J D M^cCaughey was inducted as President and Rev W E O'Reilly, Secretary. The Uniting Church in Australia Inaugural Celebration (NSW Synod) was held in the Hordern Pavilion, Sydney on Saturday 25th June 1977. The first service at St Andrew's, as a congregation and Parish of the Uniting Church in Australia, was held on 26th June 1977. At 7.00pm that evening, a Uniting Celebration Service was held at the Rockdale Town Hall, when local churches joined in a combined service.

On 1st January 1980, Brighton-le-Sands Uniting Church became a member congregation of St George Parish, with the Arncliffe, Bexley, Kogarah (Gray Street), Rockdale and West Botany Street Uniting Churches. On 17th February 1980, St Andrew's congregation was officially welcomed at the St George Parish celebration. The Synod Property Board granted money from the Arncliffe property sale for new extensions to be built at the rear of St Andrew's Church, comprising a downstairs and upper rooms, together with a new kitchen in the hall, toilet block, access driveway and covered way between the church and hall. A Dedication Service was held on 30th August 1980, which included the re-located Honour Roll and memorial plaques from the Arncliffe Church that are still in the Hall. A plaque recording the opening is in the lower room.

(. . . tbc next issue)

POSTSCRIPT

As previously announced, this is the last time that I will assemble materials for The Link. I am not aware of who the new contact is, but the materials for Lauris will need to be sent on the 21st April.

This will be the last history item that I will contribute. I now have all the archive material from Betty Johnson. It does need some sorting, which I will do, and I think that it can live in the new (to us) bookcase when the upper room is finished. If anyone would like to continue, there is a wealth of material there.

Stephen Dain

LUNCH OUTING 7 MARCH 2021

After Church we organised to go to the Bexley R.S.L. for lunch at 12.00pm. for our first social club outing after COVID-19.

There were 28 people that turned up for lunch, which was a really good attendance. A lot of talking and eating was involved.

The meals there are reasonable and they also have children's meals. They offer Chinese and Australian meals and lunch time specials.

A good time was had by all and a few people also joined the club.

If you have any suggestions for outings for the Social Club of the church, please let us know. Someone has suggested we go to the Tramway Museum at Loftus. You can catch a train to there or drive. It is open Wednesday 10am-3.30pm and Sundays from 10am-4.30pm. It may be possible to have a quick meal somewhere near there and then go to the Museum.

Pam and Charles Schofield

mob.no. 0417436208

email: pam1950@gmail.com



JUST FOR FUN!!

Covid-19 Vaccinations: Revenge of the mice

Two mice were having a conversation.

Mouse 1: Hey mate, have you had your Covid-19 vaccination?

Mouse 2: Nope, and I'm in no rush to get it.

Mouse1: Why not? It could help you not get sick from Covid.

Mouse 2: I'm waiting for the 'Human Trials' to finish.

World Day of Prayer

MOHQ DSAŁ OŁ BISAŁEI



This year's service was held at the Salvation Army church in West Botany Street, Rockdale and was written by the committee in Vanuatu with the theme "Build on a Strong Foundation".



Each year we learn about the country where the service was prepared. Vanuatu is made up of over 80 islands and is a poor country. Tourism is a large part of its income, so it has suffered from the COVID-19 pandemic. Vanuatu has been part of the World Day of Prayer since 1946 and their service reflected the difficulties women face.

We had 64 people at the service, which was good, since we expected the pandemic to affect numbers. Several guests attended, including Mr Steve Kamper, our local State MLA, from Bayside Council, Mr Joe Awarda, the Mayor, his executive assistant, Ms Veronica Giles-Cook and Councillor Ed MacDougal, Rev Matagi Vilimata, Rev Dr Hawea Jackson and Fr Emanuel Santiago plus members from all the six churches who make up the committee.


Our collection was \$906.05, which went to the Bible Society's Trauma Healing Programme in Vanuatu.

The service next year will be at Carlton-Ramsgate Uniting Church.

Alison Dain
Local Coordinator

The Back Page

April Roster

Date	Colour	Preacher & Worship Leader	Musician	Bible Reader	Prayers of the People	Welcomers	Projector	Open close + Communion	Morning tea	God's Gang
02 9am start		GOOD FRIDAY John Pritchard Joe Matamua Ese Enari	Alison & Komiti	Terangi	n/a	Charles & Harry	Ese	Harry & Kumar family		Children in church
04 9am start		EASTER SUNDAY Rev Dr Hawea Jackson (HC)	Alison & Marques	Gordon	n/a		Marques		Pam & Charles	Shirley & helper
11		Pastor Aris (tbc)	Alison & Arinona	Arinona	Arinona		Gordon		Ese & Arinona	Terangi & helper
18		Rev Dr M Vilitama	Alison & Komiti	Palwinder	n/a		Shirley		Carolyn & Talafu	Shirley & helper
25		Rev Dr Hawea Jackson (HC)	Alison & Marques	Carolyn	n/a		Stephen		Terangi & Pam	Children in church

Please arrange substitutes when you are not able to do your allocated time.

Communion Sundays—someone please bring bread

Communion Elders 4 April: Ese and Siunipa

Communion Elders 25 April: Ese and Shirley