



Living the Resurrection

By Rev Dr David Pitman

Previous Moderator of the Uniting Church in Queensland

The Gospel records tell us that the encounters the disciples had with the risen Jesus were life-changing experiences.

John, in his Gospel record, describes how the fear that gripped the disciples was transformed into joy, and how the doubt that engulfed Thomas was converted into faith, as Jesus appeared amongst his followers and restored their hope and confidence.

Then, as we know, Jesus went away again. He was no longer with them. There was no more seeing, touching or face-to-face conversation!

The potential for post-Easter depression was very real. They might have been excused for asking, "Is there life after Easter?"

All kinds of preposterous ideas have been advanced in relation to the death and resurrection of Jesus. What can't be denied is the transformation of the disciples from fearful individuals hiding away in locked rooms, to courageous public witnesses, boldly testifying to the living presence and power of Christ!

Inevitably, there is a strong element of mystery in the resurrection of Jesus. It is not something we can really understand. Rather, it is a reality we experience and therefore believe and celebrate!

So to the question, "Is there life after Easter?", the response of Christians for 2000 years has been a resounding "Yes!"

The witness of the gospel stories reminds us in a compelling way that the church did not create the idea or message of Easter.

It was out of the experience of Easter that the church was born because the followers of Jesus sensed his continuing presence amongst them and committed themselves to live as he had lived, and to pass on to others what he had taught them.

The church that grew up around that little group of men and women was a new creation. The fact that it survived is a miracle and it's a miracle that we are here today.

A multitude of forces have threatened to tear the church apart and destroy it on numerous occasions since Jesus appeared to his disciples on that first Easter Day long ago.

The church survived during all that time because Christ breathed his Spirit into it; because it is Christ's church, not ours; and because the grace of Christ is stronger than any of our human foibles and factionalism!

It has survived because of all those followers of Jesus who have understood that the Christian life is not about power, but pilgrimage; not about being served, but serving others.

It has survived because there have always been enough Christians who have been committed as disciples of Jesus to share the good news of his life, death and resurrection with others.

The resurrection stories in the Gospels contain frequent references to this ministry of witness.

The women at the tomb were told to go and tell the good news that Christ was alive and the risen Jesus commissioned his disciples to go into the world, sharing the good news and baptising those who believe.

John concludes his Gospel record with the statement that everything he has written about Jesus is motivated by his deep desire to give others the opportunity to hear the story and believe for themselves that Jesus is the Son of God and Messiah. (John 20:31)



We live in a society that is fed a constant diet of bad news and it is in this very social context that **as followers of Jesus we are called to be bearers of good news and embody the good news in our own lives.**

As a good news people we communicate the love and grace of God in both word and action.

We are a resurrection people!

We are a good news people!

Let us live who we are in faith, hope and love.

The Vision of Unity

Can Churches of Christ in Australia be an active agent for Christian Unity?

The new frontier, America, August 17 1809, after many years of personal and corporate dissatisfaction with sects and rifts within the Presbyterian Church at home and abroad, Thomas Campbell, at great risk led a small but united group of like-minded people to make a stand. The result was the creation of what we deem to be one of our founding documents known as *The Declaration and Address*. This document dismisses any former ties with the established and traditional denominationalism of the day by breaking union with the Presbyterian Church in order to set a path for freedom of Christian association. This new form of association found its guidance and structure in terms of "Thus saith the Lord, either in express terms, or by approved precedent"¹ and not through creed, practice or requirement set by men.

Campbell set the foundations of his vision for unity on Jesus' prayer in John 17, where the hope is that we (the church) would be one just as Jesus and the Father are one. Later when Campbell joined another break-away Presbyterian frontier man of God, Barton Stone the two independent 'associations' co-opted to what is now known world-wide as the Stone-Campbell Movement to which Churches of Christ in Australia belongs.

'Thomas Campbell called the division among Christians a horrid evil, and anti-Christian'². Campbell's vision of Christian Unity sought to forge a simple expression of evangelical Christianity that would, and should by the virtue of its very objectives, seek to be free from the intervention of man regarding opinion, authority, and inventions (human thinking) within the act of Christian fellowship and worship.³ Ultimately, Campbell's vision of unity was hampered by the inherent need of men to complicate the most basic things with matters of theology and/or perspective over fellowship. Following his passing, divisions grew in their ranks over matters such as communion, biblical interpretation, instrumental worship and baptism. These things have also seen much conjecture and debate here in Australia but, thankfully, have been overcome and not caused the splits like in America. This does not mean however, that we are free from rebellion, pride and prejudice in the name of autonomy, which in reality is contrary to unity is it not?

It would serve us well to remember that our heritage of Christian Unity is based on the acceptance of, and accountability to fellow believers in principle and in practice for the purpose of fellowship and worship. After all, the Stone-Campbell group is the only Protestant movement that is founded on seeking the unity of believers, not creating a new separatist denominational group.⁴ What we must overcome therefore is our own prejudice which has the tendency to illuminate differences and defend our own position. Remember, pride is the enemy in the fight for Christian Unity; when we should be accommodating we find ourselves arguing, and when we should be accepting we find ourselves judging. This is exactly the type of 'skin-deep' change that Thomas Campbell warned against.

Because unity is universal but not unilateral, we should therefore seek to be witness to Christian Unity by wholly adopting the mantle of servant leadership. Furthermore we should continue in our discussions with other groups on theological differences and shared challenges for the purpose of coming together without being defensive, seeming elite and/or of higher biblical authority. Perhaps within the body of Christ's church today we need to listen more often to our own colloquial voice 'she'll be right', and 'doesn't matter' in order to achieve unity. However, we also need to hold on to scriptural perspectives and not sell out to populist, humanistic views. At least this way, unity would be founded on what we agree on rather than what could cause an argument. We certainly have the capacity but do we have the courage?

The door has not been shut on our opportunities to promote Christian Unity but it must be through actions more than words to be fruitful, we've had enough talk. Therefore, embrace each other in Him, holding fast the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.⁵ Maybe it is our opportunity, our heritage, our call, and our time to be new risk takers.

Col Heslop

(Col is a member of the Balaklava Church of Christ, studying a Bachelor of Ministry at Tabor College in Adelaide. This is an excerpt from an essay he wrote for the subject Churches of Christ History & Identity in 2016)

¹ Thomas Campbell, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington* (Washington Pa: Brown and Sample, 1809), 4.

² Robert D Cornwell, *Freedom in Covenant* (Eugen Oregon: WIPF & Stock, 2015), 3.

³ Campbell, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington*, 18.

⁴ Carslake, *DNA of Churches of Christ*, 74.

⁵ Campbell, *Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington*, 23



Thank you and Farewell to James Bowden

Since July 2013 James Bowden has served as the State Youth Minister half time while being the Associate Minister at Blackwood Church of Christ. It is with sadness and gratitude that we

said fare well to James from his State Youth Ministry role on March 10th. James will be taking some time off as he and Carly welcome their second child into the world very soon. In the middle of this year James will commence ministry at Blackwood Church of Christ in a full time capacity as the Ministry Team Leader.

We are grateful for the work James has facilitated in building up and sustaining youth ministries across the state. He spent a lot of his time, mentoring, training and caring for youth leaders in our churches. James was also overseeing State Youth Games and our state youth camping ministry.

In a message to leaders James says: "I've loved being able to serve alongside you all these last few years. It has been a massive privilege to see God at work in and through you and a real blessing to receive your support. Your character and faith has been a visible reminder to me that God – in his own patient and gracious way – is at work in our world, and nothing will stop him from bringing that work to completion."

In James' absence the State Ministry Team is working on a transition to ensure commitment to supporting the growth of our state youth ministry continues. Two new roles are being created to

replace the State Youth Minister: Youth Events Coordinator and Youth Ministry Coach. These two roles will be supported and guided by a newly reformed Youth Vision SA Executive. There will be more details on this to come.

Welcome Carl Milne

This week our new Youth Events Coordinator, Carl Milne joins the State Ministry Team.

Following James Bowden's conclusion in the role of State Youth Minister, we announced we will not be continuing the State Youth Minister role as it has been but instead, split the role into two - Youth Events Coordinator and Youth Ministry Coach.

Carl will be overseeing events such as State Youth Games, the youth camping ministry and other youth and young adult related events one day a week. Carl also wears another hat as National Youth Ministry Conference (NYMC) Director one day a week and works out of the state office in this capacity as well.

Carl brings over 20 years experience volunteering with Youth Vision in South Australia as a camp leader, Youth Vision executive member, State Youth Games taskforce member and youth group leader among other things. Carl was recently the Chair of the Youth Vision executive and worked for Encounter Youth.

The State Ministry Team is grateful for Carl's enthusiasm to serve Churches of Christ in SA & NT and the depth of experience he brings to the team.



Situations Vacant

Business Manager

The Business Manager is a key member of the State Office Team of Churches of Christ in SA & NT, resourcing the mission of affiliated congregations. The Business Manager will provide oversight of financial, operational and governance processes for Churches of Christ in SA & NT Inc.

This is a full-time position, but consideration may be given to suitable applicant who would prefer less than full-time employment.

For full Job Description and Person Specifications, and Application Details see:

www.churchesofchrist-sa.org.au

or email: gelsdon@churchesofchrist-sa.org.au

Youth Ministry Coach

There is an opportunity available for the appropriate candidate to serve as part of the Churches of Christ SA & NT State Ministry Team. The role of Youth Ministry Coach is a part time position for 2 days a week, and is open for applications.

For more information see:

www.churchesofchrist-sa.org.au



Thank you and Farewell to Ruth Telfer



After 15½ years of faithful service Ruth Telfer has retired from her position as Financial Administrator for Churches of Christ in SA & NT Inc. Friday 31 March was her last 'official' day in the office.

Ruth commenced working with Churches of Christ in SA on 11 September 2001 when the State Office was in Melbourne Street, North Adelaide. This means she has worked in three different State Offices in teams led by two State Ministers, one interim State Minister and two Business Managers.

During that time she has seen the finance department develop through significant changes in both technology and accounting procedures. She has a very keen eye for detail and has worked diligently to ensure the best possible outcomes in all that she has undertaken. Her financial spreadsheets are something of a wonder to behold!

Her responsibilities included administering the finances of the Building Extension Mutual Fund, in

addition to the general accounts of Churches of Christ in SA & NT. Ruth's knowledge of our churches, and so many of the people involved in them, has been a unique advantage to the operations of the State Office and will be greatly missed.

Ruth also volunteered for many years on the Women's Ministry Committee and was largely (if not solely in later years) responsible for the production of the fantastic **WiseLink** newsletter that was mailed and, in later years, emailed to a large and appreciative audience.

She has also contributed significantly to a range of Conference women's events including camps, retreats and other gatherings. At one stage Ruth was employed one day per week with Women's Ministry in SA and was responsible for producing the innovative **Freedom 5:13** magazine, which was distributed nationally.

On behalf of the *State Board*, the *Building Extension Mutual Fund*, the *State Ministry Team* and the *Churches of Christ congregations* across South Australia we say **thank you Ruth Telfer**, and may 'retirement' be a rich and satisfying season for you.

South Sudan Emergency Famine Appeal

In February 2017 famine was declared in Unity State and Northern Bahr el Ghazal State (where COCOA's Emmanuel, Ploughs, and Health Professional Support Projects are located). This comes at a time when South Sudan is already in crisis. 3 million people have been forced to flee their homes and 7.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance and protection because of conflict, inter-community violence, economic decline, disease and climate shock. The fighting has simply meant that farmers have been unable to plant and grow food for their communities.

In response Global Mission Partners is partnering with the ACT Alliance South Sudan forum members and the South Sudan Council of Churches. These organisations have staff and resources on the

ground and can act quickly and provide Food Relief, Nutrition, Emergency Health, seeds, tools and care. Around 250,000 severely affected people across South Sudan will benefit.



Details of the response are on the ACT Alliance website <http://actalliance.org/alerts/famine-crisis-response-in-south-sudan/>

Your tax-deductible gift to GMP through Churches of Christ Overseas Aid (COCOA) will bring humanitarian assistance to those in greatest need. *Attached is an appeal response form for those who would like to contribute to the emergency relief in South Sudan.*

Give now to provide urgent emergency relief for those facing famine in South Sudan at www.gmp.org.au/south-sudan-famine