



'We are not asked to love the neighbour as neighbour, but as ourselves,'

Geevargese Mar Osthantios

Hope, in the midst of anxiety and disparity.

written by Dave Tims

What a year was 2020, and one that will never to be forgotten. I am grateful for our country's leadership during this time. However, if you are like me, COVID feels like a dark cloud that follows us around, we are never too sure when the next thunder storm will hit us. The cloud leaves us with uncertainty; will the new strand of COVID

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hit N.Z, will the gap between the rich and poor change, will the crazy housing and rent prices slow down? Though this dark cloud will affect all of us, it always affects the most vulnerable and poor first. We have already experienced the affects of COVID in our neighbourhood, and it hurts to see the pain. Holding onto the hope that

comes from knowing that we are loved by a greater power than this world - to be loved by God, to be known and to be treasured, brings hope, no matter what the circumstances.

Our definition of poverty is "a lack of options, both perceived and real, that are caused from historical events, systematic injustice and personal choices". Poverty, no matter where it is, is harsh and the struggle is real, but our hope, is to see our neighbours flourish, with a deepening connectedness to God, in their relationships with others and in a system that is fair to all. Despite the anxiety and disparity of COVID, this 'Word on the Street' is full of stories of well-being that have created options and prosperity.

We hope you enjoy this edition.



Significance in the simple things.

written by Denise Tims

"All that is sweet, delightful, and amiable in this world, in the serenity of the air, the fineness of seasons, the joy of light, the melody of sounds, the beauty of colors, the fragrancy of smells, the splendour of precious stones, is nothing else but Heaven breaking through the veil of this world."

William Law, 18th century English cleric.

The smell of sizzling sausages and meat cooking on our BBQ wafted across our nostrils as we gathered together to give thanks for 2020. What a privilege it was to be able to meet together especially after the COVID lockdowns had made this, a year that we would never forget. It was a time that reminded me of the significance of the simple things in life and to be grateful for the ability to meet in a

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large group. The year had been one where we had to make changes and adapt. Meeting together had been difficult but our volunteer youth workers had kept in touch with their small groups of teenagers via social media and met when they could.

As our TNG High School youth club sat huddled together, nervous giggles rippled around the table. Gratitude is an important practice and we had asked our youth to share briefly something to thank

their youth workers for. As each young person stood and spoke I was confronted again by the significance and importance of living within a neighbourhood like Randwick Park.



Twenty-one year old Helen Ergec had chosen to move into Randwick and live with us for the year. Making choices like this are not easy but completing her youth placement with us as she studied at Carey Baptist College resulted in her impacting and touching the lives of a group of teenage girls. Some deep and personal conversations had been had over the year as the girls had felt safe to confide in her with their own joys and struggles.

Helen's small group had recently returned from a camp to Whangarei and as the girls shared their appreciation the realisation of privilege and how much we take things for granted came back to me. For many of us that are not bound by poverty or a poverty mindset, assume that holidays and experiences outside the town or city we live in, are the norm. Being a Kiwi and exploring our beautiful country such as our beaches, lakes, mountains, rivers and native bush are opportunities many of us have and continue to take. However, it was very clear as the girls spoke, that most of them had never been to a place like Whangarei, a town only 2.5 hours from Auckland. Experiences such as sea kayaking, climbing high hills, camping and traveling to

another place were new adventures for them. I remember previously sharing with Helen the significance that a camp would make if she organised a trip for her small group. As I listened to the girls this trip solidified my resolve.

As we reflect upon the year, though it has been one that has been incredibly difficult, can we think of something that we can give thanks for. Gratitude is a thankful appreciation of what we may receive, be it tangible or intangible. Studies suggest that daily practice of gratitude improves our emotional and social well-being. Gratitude helps us connect to something larger than ourselves. It causes us to be grateful for people, nature and God.

Building bridges in relationships.

written by Dave Tims

Relationships are the currency of the neighbourhood. Building deep and meaningful relationships requires intentionality, time and compassion. The ability to do so has become a lost art. Getting to know your neighbour, is something we talk about, but very few people actually know their neighbours. Why is this?

It's partly because we focus upon other priorities that demand our time and energy such as work, entertainment and family. Many of our houses are surrounded by fences that are deliberately designed to keep people out. We also play games with relationships. Dave Andrew's names this the 'piety' game and the 'welfare' game.

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The 'piety' game is when we convince ourselves and others of our own virtue and from that place, we judge others. This polarises ourselves from others, negatively labelling and justifying our non-committal relationships. Labels of others such as 'gossip', 'hopeless', 'lazy' or 'poor', can give us an excuse to either distance ourselves or become a 'rescuer' and 'project/programme focused. A saviour type approach can creep in, where we relate to people as if they need saving and have no ability to help themselves. We can fall into 'helping' others and reward ourselves as if we are attaining a trophy. People become objects rather than real human beings and we forget that they are just like us. Often compassion and empathy from a friendship relationship is needed.

In the community the 'welfare' game can occur where we give the appearance of being involved but actually do very little. If you can play this game well, you can gain a lot of credit for it.

This is outplayed in two ways - either we start projects for people where they attend, consume and then leave, or we

employ professionals to do the job for us. The following story illustrates this.

One evening I was invited to attend a Community Outreach Dinner. Arriving to the church hall I was surprised at the number of people attending. The smell coming from the kitchen was divine. As people sat and waited, the chatter from the tables was loud and filled with plenty of laughter. There seemed to be a great culture happening. To my surprise I saw someone I knew. We both smiled and he invited me to join his table. I discovered he'd separated from his partner, was living alone, was isolated and unemployed. He loved coming to this church meal. The food was always good and he could just come and go. "Come and go?" I asked, "What does that mean?" He explained that he wasn't expected to do anything, the meal was free, and he could leave or stay as long as he wanted. No one followed up, so he could just enjoy the meal without any expectation of contributing in any way. The meal was amazing, roast pork, veggies and a great dessert. After the meal we hugged and my friend left.



As I stayed at the table reflecting upon what my friend had said, the Community Outreach Co-ordinator came and sat down next to me. His face had deep lines of worry, and he asked if he could talk.

“Dave, can I ask you a question that has been troubling me? “Sure, what’s on your mind,” I replied.

While he spoke he pointed to the empty tables stacked with dirty dishes. *“I’m feeling more and more uneasy with this. I’ve been running this dinner for years and the same guys keep coming back, but nothing seems to change. They seem to stay as they are. Over the years I’ve come to know them. They’ve come to church. It’s awkward and then they soon leave. I don’t know what to do?”*

As I listened I needed to probe deeper. *“Can I ask you some questions?”* The Co-ordinator nodded. *“Tell me who is in the kitchen preparing and serving the food and who cleans up afterwards?”* He looked at me, questionably, *“That’s a strange question. It’s the church volunteers of course. Why do you ask?”* *“I’ll come back to that,”* I answered. *“When you say change, what are you looking for? Have you ever asked the guys, if they’d like to help? What are the opportunities for them to participate?”*

Yes he said, *“We have asked but no one came forward, they just sat there.”*

“Have you ever thought why they responded that way?” I asked, *“Sometimes people need more than just a good meal. Sometimes people want to feel included, they want a place where they can belong, where they can contribute, where they can have ownership and responsibilities. When this happens, dignity and mana have an opportunity to flourish.”*

“Oh”, he nodded, *“That could get messy. I’m not sure how the church volunteers would take that. Would they still have a role?”*

There are some big questions to ask about the welfare game - but one of the most serious issues relates to who actually benefits the most and who

holds the power? In this situation, the church volunteers benefited the most. They felt good about what they did, they gained a lot of wider credibility for what they achieved and they held all the power. Though the intent of the church volunteers was admirable, those that attended the dinner, were not partners, instead they became ‘consumers’. Dave Andrews says *“The problem with the welfare game is a problem of all games: they alienate us from one another. Not only do some win and some lose; but those who win, do so at the expense of others.”*

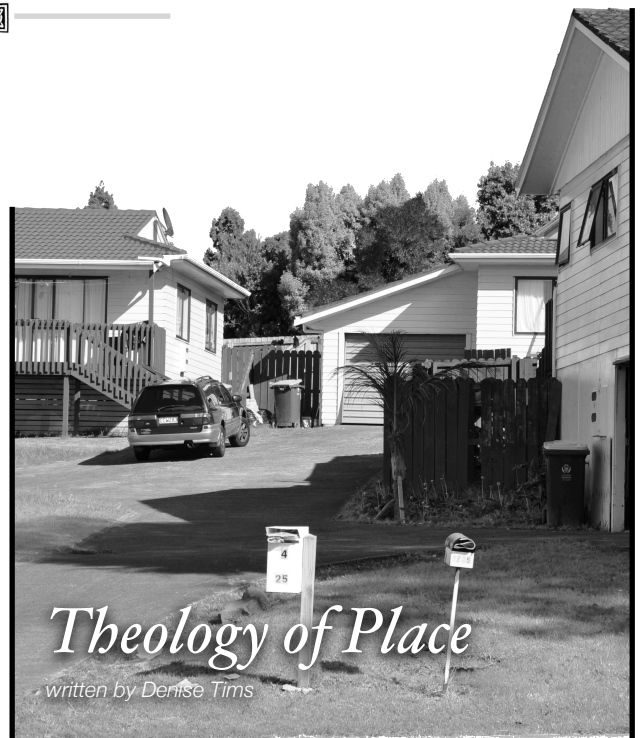
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We will never be able to build bridges with our communities until we meet face to face with those from our community and share power as partners. That means getting together with people, sharing personal stories, hopes and dreams, times of pain and times of celebration. It’s about exploring how we can meet each others needs, as well as the needs of the neighbourhood , where we can work on a plan together. This can only be done in relationship with each other - it takes time, and it’s about valuing each others stories and creating spaces so that the gifts and talents of each person have a place to be expressed and valued. - Relationships are the currency of neighbourhoods.



While we live in the midst of a worldwide pandemic I cannot help but think how privileged I am to be living in a country like New Zealand. Though I see and sense God's spirit moving in and around me, I struggle to determine in some areas what parts of life are truly God's plan and what parts are not. In scripture I see that from the beginning of God's creation story, a 'Theology of Place' can be located, where the creation of human beings, that embody particular places and spaces are shown to be part of God's plan and design. Here we find references to place, for an individual and a people in relationship with God and neighbour.

In God's first encounter with human beings a relationship develops in a special place, Eden. As the population grows, land is divided and allocated to different peoples and tribes, to provide a place to live and share life. Land was a source of provision in resources, and it was valued, entrusted too, protected, fought over and stolen. Along with land, there were places and spaces that were occupied in different ways; some spaces and places were sacred and holy, formal or informal, private or public. The land, places and spaces shaped a people and the people shaped a land, place and space.



The Jewish-Christian tradition was deeply rooted in a theology of place, with other theologies and themes branching from it. Conradie, suggests "a theology of nature, culture, homeless wandering, rootedness, the occupation and contestation over land, pastures and water, tabernacle, war and peace, genealogy, life, education, mission, empire, church and state" as well as ecotheology. In all of this social control, ownership and power are pivotal in not just how the land is valued, but also how the people live on the land, engage with the land and interact with each other.

As we watch the decisions of those in power of other countries, we see conflicting worldviews and values. Some we agree with and others we don't. Laws, policies, practices and processes are shaped by those in power and control and with this, people's lives are impacted and affected.

In last year's Time Magazine, N.T Wright reminds us of lament and that not only did the people of God lament over times of "frustration, sorrow, loneliness and sheer inability to understand what is happening and why" but that God also laments and grieves. "As the Spirit laments within us, so we become even in our self-isolation, small shrines where the presence and healing love of God can dwell. And out of that there can emerge new possibilities, new acts of kindness, new scientific understanding, new hope." (<https://time.com/5808495/coronavirus-christianity/>).

Let's continue to pray for those in leadership of our country and of other nations. May God grant those in positions of national

power, honesty, wisdom and a priority of care for human life as they make decisions that will affect the life or death of their fellow human beings in the places they live.

The UNOH Board wish to pass on their gratitude and thanks to everyone who has supported UNOH through prayer, finances or practical ways.

Dave and Denise will be making contact with their supporters to arrange a time and place to meet face to face. UNOH is truly indebted to you all. We welcome our new supporters and acknowledge our faithful longer term supporters.

Your partnership has enabled UNOH workers to faithfully serve Jesus in their neighbourhoods of Randwick Park & Wainuiomata and encourage others who have a heart to live intentionally in their neighbourhood.

A candle light in the window. *Written by Denise Tims*

While teddy bears appeared in windows across New Zealand to help occupy children and bring a smile to their faces as they went outside during the coronavirus lockdown, with even the Prime Minister taking part, another symbolic message came to mind that told a very different story, as I walked passed my neighbours home.

In early America, the tradition of lighting candles in windows during Christmas had been interpreted in many ways. It was often a sign of welcome to a loved one, a beacon of hope for people passing by and a signal to strangers that they could receive food and shelter in that home. Sources trace this practice back to the Irish who immigrated to America.

In Ireland we are aware that the British Government, between 1691 and 1778, persecuted the Irish and inflicted oppressive Penal Laws, targeting the Catholics in an attempt to suppress their religion. Catholic priests were punished for practicing their faith and ordered to leave the country. In response, faithful Irish Catholics would, light a candle in the window and leave the door unlocked as a sign that it was safe for the priest to say Mass and to receive hospitality. (Ray Boas, "The Walpole Clarion - Candles in the Window" December 2019)

As I looked in the window of my neighbours home, I knew sadly that there would be no candle lit to welcome a whānau member home. For my neighbours a candle had been blown out

and their loved one would no longer be returning home. Instead a hearse was parked in the driveway as a handful of family gathered around to say a final farewell. When Dave had invited neighbours to respond in acts of kindness and compassion, to our grieving family, food was delivered and a koha of over five hundred dollars was gathered. Death, and being able to farewell our loved ones, has been one of the most difficult situations to cope with during our COVID lockdown restrictions. When our neighbour and friend passed away in the midst of this pandemic, only a handful of family members could gather to comfort and console one another.

When the hearse slowly drove away, we knew no funeral service would be held to honour and say goodbye, sharing with the family, in their time of grief. It seemed such a cold hard reality. With tears rolling down my face as I joined with neighbours to line our street, all we could do was hold down our car horns to farewell our friend, who was taking his final journey out of our neighbourhood. The only candle that could be lit this time was that of Christ, and it was His light that would welcome our beloved neighbour home to give him peace and everlasting rest.

