

SALTBUSH  
UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY

# Ruminations



# Practice






Spring / Summer 2020


**Ruminations** is brought to you as part of **Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community**. The Uniting Church Synod of NSW & ACT oversees this work as an encouragement to all rural Christian communities and their leaders, irrespective of size or location. You are invited to share this issue of Ruminations with others.


Rev. Mark Faulkner  
Director of Rural and Remote Ministry Initiatives  
Uniting Mission and Education.

Editors:

Mark Faulkner  
Geoff Wellington  
Tim Jensen

-  Uniting the Scattered Community
-  PO Box 221 Canberra City, 2601
-  0477720151
-  saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au
-  <https://saltbushcommunity.uca.org.au/>

 Please consider donating to support Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community and through it Ruminations. Information on financially supporting can be found on the back cover.

 All articles and images in this publication have been used by permission or purchase. Please get permission before reprinting.

# What's in this issue of Ruminations?

• Editor's Introduction	2
• The Theme of Practice	5
• The Spiritual practice of Christian meditation	9
• Our Stories	15
• Experiencing the Word	19
• News from Saltbush	26

## Contributors:

**Rev. Linda Chapman** is the Rector in the Anglican Parish of Moruya & Open Sanctuary, Tilba Tilba, NSW. Linda comes from the contemplative stream of the church and is committed to the marriage of the contemplative and active life particularly in relation to social and ecological justice.

**Ann Sloan** works with her husband Alexander on their station at Savernake NSW. Savernake Station is a working historic pastoral property, 20 minutes north of Lake Mulwala, on the Murray River at Yarrawonga. Ann has a deep passion for her faith along with the land and the creation in which we live.

**Rev. Mark Faulkner, Rev. Tim Jensen & Lay Pastor Geoff Wellington** are your Saltbush Scattered Community Ministers as part of the work of the Uniting Church Synod of NSW & ACT. Each of us bring our own gifts and perspectives on practice with the Christian faith. Together, we are passionate about encouraging the exploration of life and faith amongst our many scattered Uniting Christian communities and the way we encourage discipleship beyond.

# Editor's Introduction

Welcome to your winter edition of Ruminations  
with the theme of ...

## Practice!

Thank you for entering into Ruminations and pondering this strange theme with us. While we often refer to “practice” as a process of repeated learning, for people of faith it is also the dedication to living out that faith and belief, inspired by God within the core of our being. This type of practice is not a task or a process, it is not a simple routine and it cannot be given to another or demanded from another. It cannot happen by doing some-thing and it cannot happen by doing no-thing. Practice, may also include some of the most mysterious and difficult aspects of both life and faith; forgiveness – prayer – discernment – awareness – and, the Way of Christ.

In this edition Geoff Wellington, Ann Sloan, Linda Chapman and myself, all reflect in different ways on the practice... of practice! Tim Jensen also brings us up to date with the ministry of the Saltbush Team and the movement of Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community, to which we can all belong.

On behalf of the Saltbush Team, Geoff, Tim and myself, we express our sincere thanks to the broad church who encourage us along the way and to those individuals who contribute to Saltbush and give this slow growing movement energy and life. We look forward to the year ahead as we continue to encourage

and grow Uniting Christian communities in the practices of discipleship and announcing the presence of the Kingdom of God.

We also look forward to 2021 as being full of more freedom, more visiting, more gathering and more boiling the billy together – (another worthwhile practice)!

Peace to you all.

Mark .

# Saltbush Sundays @4

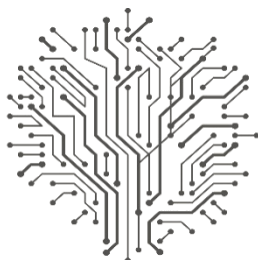
**Saltbush is offering Uniting Christian community  
online on 1<sup>st</sup> & 3<sup>rd</sup> Sundays of each month @ 4pm.**

**Ponder life and faith together from wherever you are!**

Christian communities have met in diverse places and ways down  
throughout the ages and will continue to do so  
into the future. We are all being called to discover new  
ways to gather as Christians alongside new ways to live  
out our faith within our world.

If you would like to be included simply send an email to:

**[saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au](mailto:saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au)**



Saltbush – Uniting the Scattered Community

# Practice

**Lay Pastor – Geoff Wellington**

Saltbush – Scattered Community Minister

*"Practices are those shared activities that address fundamental human needs and that, woven together, form a way of life."*

*(Dorothy C Bass. Practicing Our Faith 1997)*

During this Covid-19 pandemic many people have been forced to self-isolate, to stop their usual activities and work. This stopping has caused many to re-think their "way of life" and the usual rush of work, social engagements and family activities. For some this has come as quite a shock to their sense of wellbeing. Others have set out on "mindfulness" quests and still others are finding it very hard to be away from others and the social interaction they have taken for granted up until now. This current time of Covid-19 is raising big questions for us about how as individuals and as a society we form a way of life – a practice – a sense of being in the world.

For many centuries and perhaps from the beginning of time, religions have encouraged followers to not only believe particular things but to "practice" their faith in daily living. Christianity is no different in this regard. In the book of Acts chapter 2: 43-47 we read about one of the first Christian Communities coming together and practicing their faith in tangible ways that transformed their approach to life and those they came in contact with. Luke records ten "practices" that

theses disciples lived out including prayer, breaking bread, sharing resources, worship and eating together.

Over the centuries the Church has encouraged people to grow in their faith by entering into various “practices” like prayer, and fasting, worship and reading the bible. However arguments within the church about how these practices should be done and when they should be done has not always helped followers of Jesus. Also with the emerging of what is known as “modernism” or a scientific approach to knowledge and interaction with the world, it has pushed the Church to be public in worship and social engagement in civil matters but relegated faith to the private sphere.

Often this approach to faith and life has meant the loss of a sense of the sacredness of work and daily rhythms and reduced them to economic outcomes rather than a shaping of life and faith as an integrated whole. This sets followers of Jesus up for a very split sense of who they are and how faith shapes their way of life. In the last decade or so these negative shaping of ways of life has again started to be challenged and Christian Practices are starting to re-emerge. You may have heard of Celtic Christianity and New Monasticism. You may have read books on Faith Practices, Daily Rhythms and Practices, Praying our lives and Spiritual Retreats. All these things seek to put us as followers of Jesus in touch with the practices of the faith. To shape our whole lives around being Disciples of Christ. To value and give meaning to the everyday activities of work and play, time together in family and community, caring for the creation, taking time out to rest, offering hospitality and eventually dying well.



The living of life well informed by faith and connection to the Holy Other is more than work and economics, more than the accruing of more and more things and the holding tightly to what is mine. Jesus once said "For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life?" (Matthew 16: 26)



When I read the gospel accounts of Jesus' life travelling around modern day Israel with the Disciples I hear this same approach to faith and life. Jesus spends time alone praying and time with people teaching and building relationships. Jesus heals others and challenges the ways in which some in his society are excluded. Jesus gives and receives hospitality from those he meets. There is a rhythm to his life that is informed by the sorts of practices he carries out and it is these practices that create a way of life that transforms those around him.

I wonder what sort of practices you actively do in your life? Are they practices that are informed by your faith? How do they shape your life's meaning and purpose and bring you closer to God?

There are many books and resources to explore this topic further, so here are a few of my favourites to get you started:

**On our way: Christian Practices for living a whole life:**

[https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/film\\_series/on-our-way](https://www.theworkofthepeople.com/film_series/on-our-way)

**Practicing Our Faith:**

[https://www.bookdepository.com/Practicing-Our-Faith-Dorothy-C](https://www.bookdepository.com/Practicing-Our-Faith-Dorothy-C-Bass/9780470484111)

[Bass/9780470484111](https://www.bookdepository.com/Practicing-Our-Faith-Dorothy-C-Bass/9780470484111)

<https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/books/reviews/view/939>

**A New Monastic Handbook: From Vision to Practice:**

[https://www.bookdepository.com/New-Monastic-Handbook-Ian-](https://www.bookdepository.com/New-Monastic-Handbook-Ian-Mobsby/9781848254589)

[Mobsby/9781848254589](https://www.bookdepository.com/New-Monastic-Handbook-Ian-Mobsby/9781848254589)

**Holy Habits:**

<https://www.brfonline.org.uk/collections/holy-habits>

In this time of Covid-19 perhaps you will be encouraged to pause a while and consider adopting a Christian Practice that might bring you closer to God and it might give you a rhythm and meaning for life as well. As Dorothy Bass has commented when woven together Christian Practices form a way of life for us and this I believe is the call of the gospel to live into and to live out what is in the interests of God in all we do. To live this way is to practice our faith and shape our lives deeply attuned to the rhythm of our own lives, others around us and to the voice of God calling us to live the kingdom come in our midst.

# The Spiritual Practice of Christian Meditation

***Rev. Linda Chapman***

Rector Anglican Parish of Moruya & Open Sanctuary, Tilba Tilba, NSW

Practice makes perfect, so it is said. Is it however perfection that we need to seek or wholeness? The spiritual life after all is not about the practice of a technique or the attainment of a brilliant tennis serve.

Spiritual practice encompasses the whole human being and is not concerned with practicing for perfection, but is oriented towards becoming whole. And the journey of becoming whole includes the acceptance of our human imperfection. When we think we should be perfect, successful, always on top of things, better than others, then we will never really be 'good enough' in our own eyes. We will fail and judge ourselves as wanting or we will succeed much of the time, but exhaust ourselves with the effort.

Here I would like to briefly explore Christian meditation as a practice that bears the fruit of wholeness rather than straining us towards the idealism of perfection.

Whilst a spiritual practice, such as Christian meditation, requires discipline and commitment, just as learning to play piano or tennis do, it is not a practice that is concerned with perfecting our technique. That's not to say that practicing in order to

improve our technique in any pursuit is a bad thing. On the contrary such practice is obviously a valuable human pursuit. However, spiritual practice, meaning the observation of a regular prayer pattern, is not about perfecting a technique, or becoming perfect. The practice of prayer and meditation is about becoming whole rather than perfect. Meditation is a spiritual practice that enables us towards becoming loving, whole human beings. Through this practice we integrate our perceived shortcomings, our flaws, our wounds. In meditation we recognize that we need not 'polish up' those flaws but rather come to accept them and so be healed of the need to be perfect. We see our imperfections as part of our humanity and in accepting them are transformed. In this way the practice of meditation moves us towards wholeness. How?

To practice meditation is to set aside time each day to settle into a quiet place, sit, close one's eyes, place oneself consciously in the presence of God, relax the body and begin, silently and interiorly, to repeat a prayer word. And then to keep silently saying it for the whole time of our practice which is best at 20-30 minutes. That's it. That is all that the practice of meditation involves. What is the point of such a practice I can hear some ask! And that is a very reasonable question.

The practice of sitting silently and repeating a prayer word or mantra is an ancient form of Christian prayer going back to the early church. John Cassian, who in the 4<sup>th</sup> century went into the desert to seek a holy person to teach him to pray, was given this way of spiritual practice, of prayer that carries through to our day. It is a simple yet profoundly challenging way of prayer in that it is concerned with 'training' our mind to pay attention to one thing only so that our noisy mind may become still. And in that

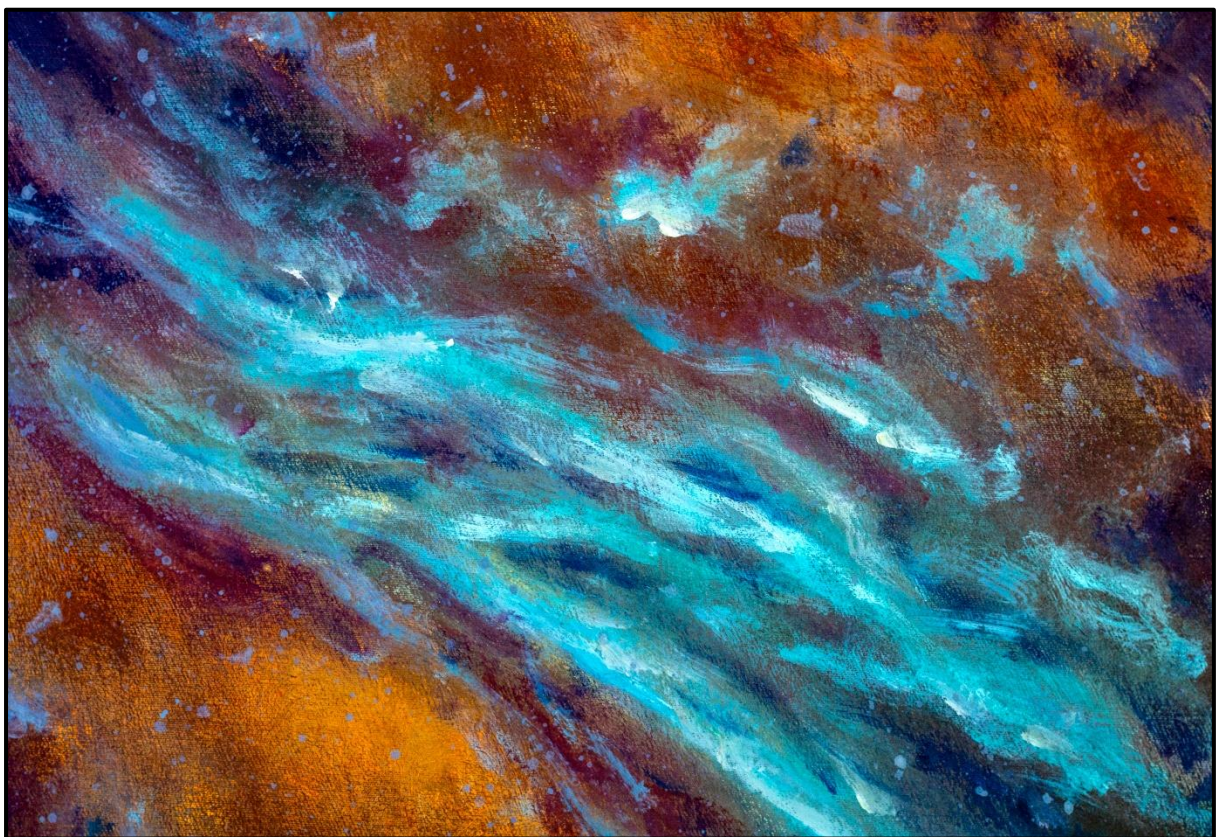
quiet stillness so to perceive the reality of God in our midst. As John Main, the Benedictine monk who recovered this way of prayer for our times said, "The important aim in Christian meditation is to allow God's mysterious and silent presence within us to become more and more, not only a reality but the reality which gives meaning, shape and purpose to everything we do, everything we are". Christian meditation is a way of practicing the presence of God. It is a way of simply being ourselves in that Presence. We ease into our true self rather than strain against ourselves to become someone else.

Meditation is just one practice of prayer in the Christian tradition. There are various way of praying. Meditation is a way of contemplative prayer. It bears the fruit of wholeness when practiced regularly. It does so by giving the busy and noisy self-conscious mind something, just one thing, to focus on. Our minds are like the proverbial tree full of parrots all squawking at once. We jump from one thought to another. We construct our own reality based on entrenched patterns of thinking and the whims of our ego. Meditation however is not what we think. Rather, by giving our attention to the one thing and returning to it whenever we drift or become distracted by a line of thought, or strong emotion, we gradually allow those multitudes of competing thoughts to settle. We might notice those thoughts and our own distracted-ness, but we do not get caught up and carried away by them. We don't judge them or ourselves we simply, gently return to the practice.

An image might help here. Imagine yourself sitting on a riverbank. There is a large flotilla of varying types of boats going by quickly on the rapidly flowing river. You are interested in all of them and your attention goes from one boat to another as



you watch some go down the river before trying to get sight of others coming along. After a time, you feel dizzy trying to keep up with them all! Now, imagine simply keeping your attention on one place in the river. You notice the boats going past but you don't get carried away with them. You keep your gaze constant, looking into the river, noticing that there is movement yet remaining attentive to the one place within that movement. So, it is when we practice the presence of God.



Meditation is simple yet challenging. Our thoughts tend to follow each other down the river. We get distracted and swept away. This may happen many times during each meditation. But when we become distracted, we need not judge ourselves. As Brother Lawrence said in his letters, when describing his practice of the presence of God, "I found no small trouble in this exercise, and yet continued it, notwithstanding all the difficulties that I

encountered, without troubling or disquieting myself when my mind had wandered involuntarily.”<sup>1</sup>

Meditation is a journey towards wholeness that cures us of the driving need to be perfect. This happens, I think, because as we practice simply saying our word for the periods of meditation each day, we see our distractedness, our drama's, our anger, resentments, envy and so on for what they are without being carried away by them. We just notice and let them go as we return to the repetition of our prayer word. We don't reject or suppress our human 'failings', so called, but accept them and refrain from judging. Certainly we recognize the need for the healing or transforming of our 'baggage' because as the Franciscan teacher Richard Rohr says, 'what we don't transform we transmit.' However this process is a way of gentle healing that, over time, gradually and sometimes imperceptibly, brings us to greater wholeness. The need to become bigger, better, more than, is transformed into the quiet delight of simply being.

So, our distractedness and our various imperfections may well become more obvious to us as we continue our practice. However, this way of prayer will enable us to see them with compassion, to accept them and so to integrate them. In this way we become whole rather than perfect! As John Main says when answering the question as to why meditation is such a powerful practice, "because it gives us the space that our spirit needs to breath. It gives each of us the space to be ourselves. When you are meditating you don't need to apologise for yourself and you don't need to justify yourself. All you need to do is to BE yourself."

---

<sup>1</sup> Brother Lawrence, 'The Practice of the Presence of God', H.R Allenson, Ltd. London 1906 p 28

We need not strain towards perfection. We can simply be ourselves. The spiritual practice of meditation will not make us perfect. But it may help us become whole.



# Our stories...

***Ann Sloan***

Savernake Station

Savernake NSW



Over my decades, I have adopted many practices across the facets of my life.

From childhood, hours of piano practice, up to three hours daily, was a sure foundation for my later career, as a music teacher in both the classroom and in private tuition. I continue to teach

privately; currently this is by zoom, which is surprisingly effective. But importantly, I continue to put time into practice myself, despite my misshapen hands. Today's technology provides wonderful opportunities; I can play along on my keyboard with online orchestras, music groups, choirs and instrumentalists. New pieces are a challenge, but so satisfying, as are playing pieces I learnt many years ago. When a piece is approaching an acceptable standard, I play along with world-class performers who won't stop when I make a mistake, or who don't play the hard passages slowly.

These times of music practice are so good for my hand health, relaxation, refining new and old favourites for when I can play for our church services again. A lack of practice could see both my musical appreciation and physical skills deteriorate to the point of uselessness.

Minimal practice in the kitchen is no doubt responsible for my culinary inadequacies. A disaster with a school project on scones deterred me forever from cooking anything beyond basic meals. My sister, a most accomplished cook, continually encourages me to get into the practice of measuring ingredients precisely, following a recipe to the letter, and learning from my failures. I admire her persistence. Will I heed her advice and increase my practice?

I find technology is a great asset in birdwatching. Natural forest provides habitat for many birds and flowers. Flowers are very co-operative, allowing for macro photos. Birds are more of a challenge: just when the focus and light are good, off they fly. I need more practice at quickly adjusting the camera settings and focusing on the right spot. Only then will I capture that special

image. And once I do, I can access an app to match the bird or flower I've seen. This takes lots of practice; one day I hope to be able to identify more birds by their calls alone.

Part of our farm was planted to saltbush 12 years ago. Formerly a small pasture paddock, the lucerne or clover was demolished every night by kangaroos from the adjacent forest. Who'd blame them? Tasty green stuff instead of chewy tough native grasses. I encouraged my husband to adopt a practice I'd learnt about, when we were members of a sustainable farming network, 'Learning from Farmers'. Some of our northern members find that saltbush is a most successful grazing plant for sheep. Its long tap roots access underground water, which sustain it through droughts. The salty leaves provide roughage, nutrition and minerals for the sheep when there is little pasture. It's a great supplement to grain during times of drought. The plants will live to 50 years or more, and should thrive in a warmer climate. An added bonus to the establishment of saltbush is the environmental value it brings to the farm. The dense leafy branches provide ideal nest sites for the little bush birds, away from the terrorising noisy miners or egg-thieving ravens. With the current lush season, it is currently untrimmed, but will be a ready source for stock fodder when required.

To ensure our farm remains sustainable in the long term for the next generation, we have adopted conservative practices such as realistic stocking rates, minimal chemical applications, and protection of trees throughout our paddocks. We have established many kilometres of shelterbelts of mixed species; they now give our lambing ewes and shorn sheep extra protection in inclement weather. Some may regard our practices as too 'green', but we feel they are essential for long-term food

and fibre production, and retain environmental values that are good for the district/region/planet!

All the above however is fraught with temptations to make the environment, or music, or pastimes a 'god'. There are innumerable challenges in the Christian life. To resist, overcome and thrive, the most important practice in my life is to understand my need for Scripture, fellowship, prayer, and to be prepared against spiritual assault (Ephesians 6:10-18). Starting and ending the day together with Scripture and prayer has been a better focus since 2017. We also have good music on our phones and even farm headphones via blue tooth. Our utes are permanently tuned to Vision Radio, which is an enormous blessing, connecting faith to our daily lives.

When things are out of routine, or unexpected, the usual daily practices can be neglected. During a family crisis I forgot to eat and drink; I then required medical treatment by late evening! How much more do we need to take in regular spiritual sustenance, as a daily practice, to persevere through life's challenges, to help others, to grow in faith and to reflect Jesus to our families and communities.

# Experiencing the Word...

**Rev. Mark Faulkner**

Director of Rural and Remote Ministry Initiatives.

## **The Practice of Unknowing – “Words without Knowledge”.**

*“Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind: <sup>2</sup> “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?””*

(Job 38: 1-8, 34-41)

My title, “The practice of unknowing - words without knowledge”, is derived from Job chapter 38 verse 2. Our translation reads: “Who is this that questions my wisdom with such ignorant words? However a more accurate reading is; “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?”

One of the aspects of life that we find the hardest is being without knowledge. Humans want to know; we want knowledge. We even begin to believe only in what we “know” and even make things up so that we can “know” something, even if it’s wrong.

Let me tell you a few things that we don’t know.

•Here is a line about 1mm long.



If I divide this 1mm line into 1000 equal widths, each of those widths is called a micron. Then if you take that micron and divide that into 10,000 tiny equal widths, you would roughly have the size of an atom. (Although atoms come in different sizes so you could have way more than that too!) Our entire world, everything, is made up of atoms. It's a degree of slenderness that is beyond our capacity to imagine. The image we have for an atom, and still often use to describe an atom is based on drawn circles, but physicists know that an atom doesn't really look like this, nor behave like our drawing or descriptions. In fact the behaviour and mass and minuteness of atoms make their characteristics fully unknowable for us.

- Another thing we don't know is the extent of the universe. Can you imagine something that never comes to an end? Or if you can only imagine an end, what is beyond the end?
- Or why is there evil in the world, created by a loving holy God?
- Or, what is it that gives life, breath, and heartbeat? What do hearts beat – how does the brain remember?

But for us as every-day humans there is the knowledge we want about things that have happened to us in our everyday existence; never mind the atom or the brain. Why did a child die? Why did my life take the course it did? Why are my relationships the way they are with various people? Why do I believe what I do, and others don't? Who am I really? Why did this or that happen to me?

These are the questions, some of the questions - and the "words without knowledge". And if we don't fear asking them they form

part of our practice as Christians and a depth of relationship with God.

- The book of Job from the Old Testament is one of the supreme offerings of the human mind to the living God and is one of the most inspired gifts of God to humanity. It is a difficult book raising difficult questions. In this book the story is told of a good man whose life is overwhelmed and overtaken by calamity and trouble. He is stripped of his health, his wife and family, his wealth and his livelihood and he does not know why this has happened to him. There are three friends who come to console him in the midst of his pain and loss and they all have a long discussion and make long speeches (just what you want in a time of grief!). The three try to pin Job's troubles on his sinfulness; that is, to say that because of his sin, Job has been plagued. Job however rejects the advice of his three friends insisting on his own innocence and outright questions the justice of what is happening to him. Then a fourth character comes into the story, a man named Elihu, who makes four long speeches which he believes will solve Job's troubles; but even these long speeches, all these words, all these good intentions, make no difference to Job. Job still has his questions about why this has happened to him and cries out to be heard, to be listened to, which we read in chapter 31 verse 35;

"If only I had someone who would listen to me and try to see my side! Look, I will sign my name to my defence. Let the Almighty show me that I am wrong. Let my accuser write out the charges against me."

This wonderful book, raises the complexities of human existence and suffering. It plumbs the depths of human despair, the anger



of moral injustice, and the sense of desertion by God; the absence of God.



All this while so far in the book of Job, God has not spoken. The suffering, the loss, the disease, the pain, the friends and their



discussions and speeches have taken place in the midst of the silence of God. The book of Job is 41 chapters long, and it is not until chapter 38 that God speaks up. Here Job is answered from within the whirlwind or chaos. However the response to Job from God comes in the form of... more questions!

"Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:

<sup>2</sup> "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?

<sup>3</sup> Gird up your loins like a man,  
I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

<sup>4</sup> "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?  
Tell me, if you have understanding.

<sup>5</sup> Who determined its measurements—surely you know!  
Or who stretched the line upon it?

<sup>6</sup> On what were its bases sunk,  
or who laid its cornerstone

<sup>7</sup> when the morning stars sang together  
and all the heavenly beings<sup>[a]</sup> shouted for joy?

<sup>8</sup> "Or who shut in the sea with doors  
when it burst out from the womb?—

<sup>34</sup> "Can you lift up your voice to the clouds,  
so that a flood of waters may cover you?

<sup>35</sup> Can you send forth lightnings, so that they may go  
and say to you, 'Here we are'?

<sup>36</sup> Who has put wisdom in the inward parts,<sup>[a]</sup>  
or given understanding to the mind?<sup>[b]</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Who has the wisdom to number the clouds?  
Or who can tilt the water skins of the heavens,

<sup>38</sup> when the dust runs into a mass  
and the clods cling together?

<sup>39</sup> "Can you hunt the prey for the lion,  
or satisfy the appetite of the young lions,

<sup>40</sup> when they crouch in their dens,

or lie in wait in their covert?

<sup>41</sup> Who provides for the raven its prey,  
when its young ones cry to God,  
and wander about for lack of food?"

... and on the questions go for Job.

It is God saying that Job's words, his questions, are words without knowledge, highlighted by the questions that God raises in the whirlwind, questions, and challenges, to which we hold no answers, or knowledge, even so many thousands of years after this story of Job was written. And in the end when all is done, in the end of the book of Job, and the end for our own existence too, the many questions of Job are not answered, the many questions of our lives are not answered, the mystery remains, and God stands revealed in God's hiddenness, revealed by the mystery and unknown of much, as hard as that is for us to understand, and as hard as that if for us to accept in our desire for knowledge. In the end there is God; the One of eternity, creation, and love.

One of the aspects of life that we find the hardest, is being without knowledge. Humans want to know; we want knowledge. We feel most comfortable when we can explain it, whatever it is. We like lines, and boxes, and rules and laws. We like black and white, but not grey. We like things that can fit into our reasoning and our minds. We are like James and John; we want to know what is next, and can we sit in places that are safe and organised for us. And we are troubled when something in life pulls us beyond the place where we are comfortable; beyond our knowledge.

At the very end of the book of Job (chapter 42), following the many questions from God to Job, the many searching statements, Job has a short reply, and this is what he says.

Then Job answered the LORD:

- <sup>2</sup> "I know that you can do all things,  
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.  
<sup>3</sup> 'Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?'  
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,  
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.  
<sup>4</sup> 'Hear, and I will speak;  
I will question you, and you declare to me.'  
<sup>5</sup> I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,  
but now my eye sees you;

In the end for Job, there is still the suffering and loss, many questions, much that is unknown, mystery and hiddenness, but there is God, not just the hearing about God, but there is the seeing, the experience of God.

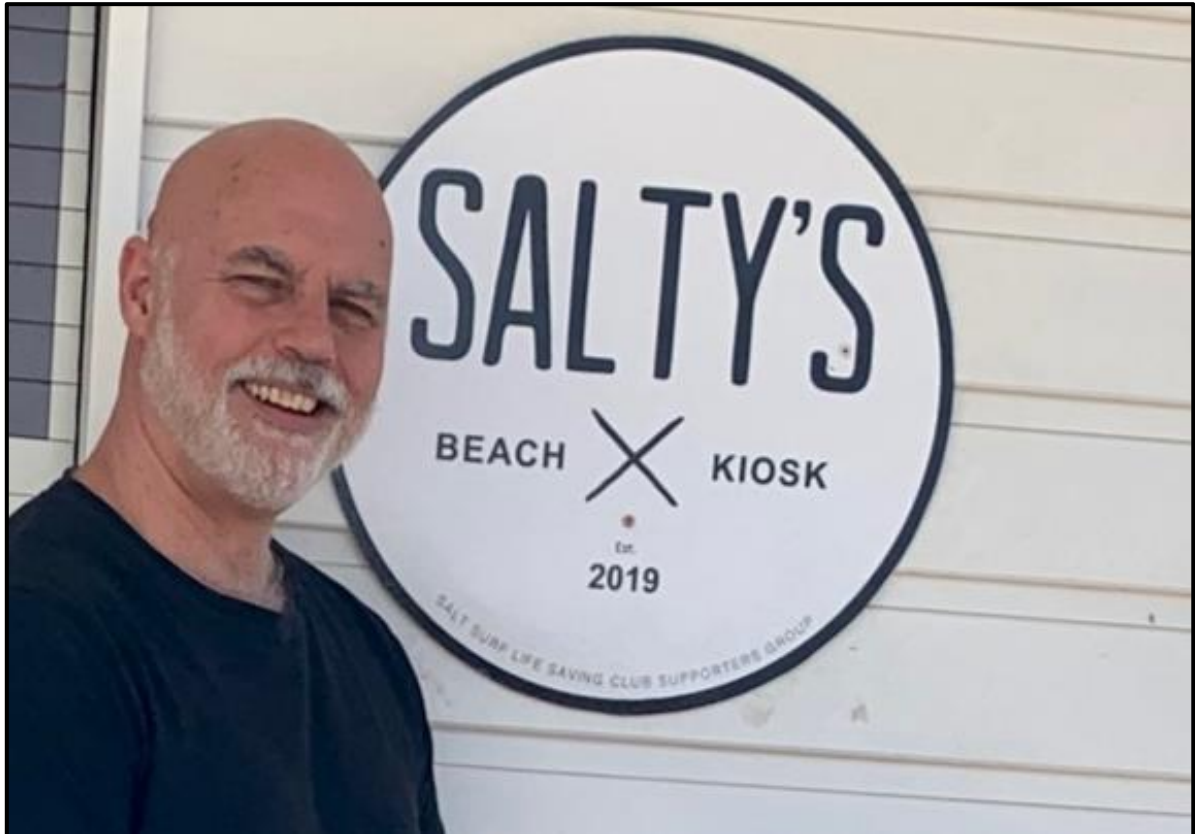
Being in this unknowing, this place of words without knowledge, or better still, silence without knowledge is part of the practice of the Christian life. It's an important place and the only place where one can move from simply "hearing" to "seeing". Inadvertently we try to fill this space of unknowing with law and judgement, busyness and boxes, ego and opinion, while failing to see that the glass of wine in our hand is as mysterious as is eternity as is God.

Entering into this place of "being", rather than "knowing", is a practice that takes us, like Job, to a place of "seeing", even a place of peace, and into a deeper experience of God.

# News from Saltbush...

***Rev. Tim Jensen***

Saltbush – Scattered Community Minister



When I played club rugby my first coach had a saying: 'perfect practice makes perfect.' So all our drills were done repeatedly until we completed five in a row.... perfectly. The only problem was that the opposition hadn't heard about our coach's saying and they made a mockery of our perfect practice. A few years later we had different coaches who were also players. The saying was "be free to try something different if what we practice isn't working". It was a long saying. But it worked and it respected the skills and the intelligence (yes! I know rugby players can think) of the team. It meant that we allowed ourselves the freedom to change according to the challenges we faced in a difficult game.

Being adaptable was our new practice. It was not about being perfect but being wise and making the most of a challenge. As we hear a lot these days; never let a crisis go to waste or turn a crisis into an opportunity also known as a 'crisitunity'.\*

Saltbush has been exploring ways that we can make the most of this time while keeping with the practice of being faithful as a Christian community. It has meant that we rely heavily on our online platforms and zoom; a lot of zoom. However we believe that it has not diminished our traditions or engagement with each other, it has just rearranged how they happen. One of the clearest examples of this is our celebration of Holy Communion. For many as we participate together in this profound act of thanksgiving, communion and community, there is a sense of connection and oneness that moves us beyond our local gatherings to people from all over the land. It has also emphasised for some, the importance of the ritual of preparing for communion: setting aside the wine or juice and finding the bread. While it might not be a common cup that is shared or loaf that is broken, it is a sharing what we all have in common, a deep sense of communion and belonging to the One who is present in all of our lives.

As churches are slowly returning to be together within the new ways of meeting we have changed our Saltbush@9 to Saltbush@4 every 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday. We want to encourage communities to keep gathering face to face and have the 4pm service as a time to gather with the Saltbush community. As always, Word around the Bush (our visual messages) are pre-recorded and found on the Saltbush Community website at: **[saltbushcommunity.uca.org.au](http://saltbushcommunity.uca.org.au)**

The Saltbush website is a great source of all that is happening with Saltbush and along with our Facebook and Instagram posts our digital presence is ever widening.

Saltbush now has conversations available on podcast – Salty Conversations! There are a number of interviews with people from all the different aspects of church life, with the hope of capturing a sense of where people are at in their faith journeys wherever they live. On the Saltbush website click on 'Conversations' on the top ribbon and follow the prompts – you can also subscribe.

Through Ruminations we are hoping to continue to bring stories that are both captivating and inspiring as a hard copy and online. Providing a snapshot of the innovative and unique expressions of faith in action. All issues of Ruminations are also posted to read on the website.

Our Cafés continue to offer a space of connection for those exploring the more nuanced aspects of our faith journey. We have had Cafés on the Gospel of Matthew, guest speakers and lectionary readings. Mark has just finished hosting a five week café called 'Water for the Journey'. Geoff is currently hosting the latest café based around the lectionary and then later in November I will be exploring Advent. The cafés are an excellent way to engage with those whose experiences and stories of faith are so different and varied to our own.

Due to Covid our Scattered Community Gatherings have gone digital for the moment. Our 'Dubbo' Gathering (September 12<sup>th</sup>) was zoomed but had the same format as if we were together. At this Gathering we were joined by Rev. Dr. John Squires and Rev.

Elizabeth Raine as they presented the Gospel of Matthew. John was a New Testament lecturer at UTC and is an avid blogger and Elizabeth is fascinated by the Gospel of Matthew and is self-proclaimed nerd for translating all things from the Greek.

Alongside all these events we have regular zoom meetings, connecting on the ground with individuals and congregations (where we can), being involved in supportive ways with the wider church and always exploring new ways of mission and ministry in this new era of being community. Our practice is to continue to encourage and connect Uniting Christian communities with a clear theological foundation which respects our journeys of faith with the Creator, the Christ and the Holy Spirit.

The saying of my coaches, "to try something different", continues to resonate with me, giving me freedom to try something new, to work out how to speak and act in challenging circumstances and to grow in wisdom learning from both successes and failures. But most importantly to know it doesn't have to be perfect. I think this is all good practice and it is, I believe, a reflection of our journey with God. The Church has always had the freedom to move with change and to be transformed as the Spirit of God continues to lead and guide us. We don't have to be perfect but allow our relationship with the True Ground of our being call us to companionship, love and unity so we might grow in wisdom, hope, love and faith.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Tim". The script is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

\*Attributed to Homer Simpson, The Simpsons.







**Please consider financially supporting Saltbush; either as individuals or as a congregation.**

Your donation will be directly used for the work of supporting Saltbush and the ways we are working to encourage smaller, rural congregations.

You can donate generally towards Saltbush and this will include the cost of enabling the printing of Ruminations.

To donate please make a direct transfer:

Bank: Uniting Financial Services  
Account Name: Uniting Mission & Education EFT Direct

**BSB: 634-634**  
**Account Number: 100035066**

Payment Reference: **"Saltbush"**