

Ruminations

Winter 2024



SALTBUSH
UNITING THE SCATTERED COMMUNITY

Discovering



Contributors

Rev. Geoff Flynn has been in ministry in Canberra, Wagga Wagga, Wollongong and last year began his placement in Tamworth. Geoff is committed to the rural church and community and brings strong leadership within a pastoral gift. In this edition of Ruminations, Geoff writes our Experience of the Word.

Tash Holmes: Driven by a deep-seated belief in the transformative power of the arts, Tash is on a mission to enliven church communities through creativity, innovation, and thoughtful design. With an eye for opportunity and a heart for connection, they embrace every opportunity to weave together the threads of spirituality and artistry - creating spaces where faith is felt, expressed, and celebrated. As a UME Mission Catalyst – Uniting Creative, Tash can be contacted at natashaho@nswact.uca.org.au

Jenny Rose is a Uniting Church lay leader and preacher in Hillston NSW – 700km west of Sydney. Jenny is a passionate carer towards others and brings her faith and spirit life into the wider community and lives of others. Jenny is called on often to give voice to faith and hope in times of community need.

Tom Sloane is an Aboriginal Pastor and Artist. Tom is the current Pastor at Nanima Wellington UAICC and has been in ministry for 10 years.

Nathan Tyson works with the Synod of NSW & ACT in the role of Director, First Peoples Strategy and Engagement. Nathan is an Aboriginal man who has spent most of his life in Sydney and is of Anaiwon/Gomeroi descent.

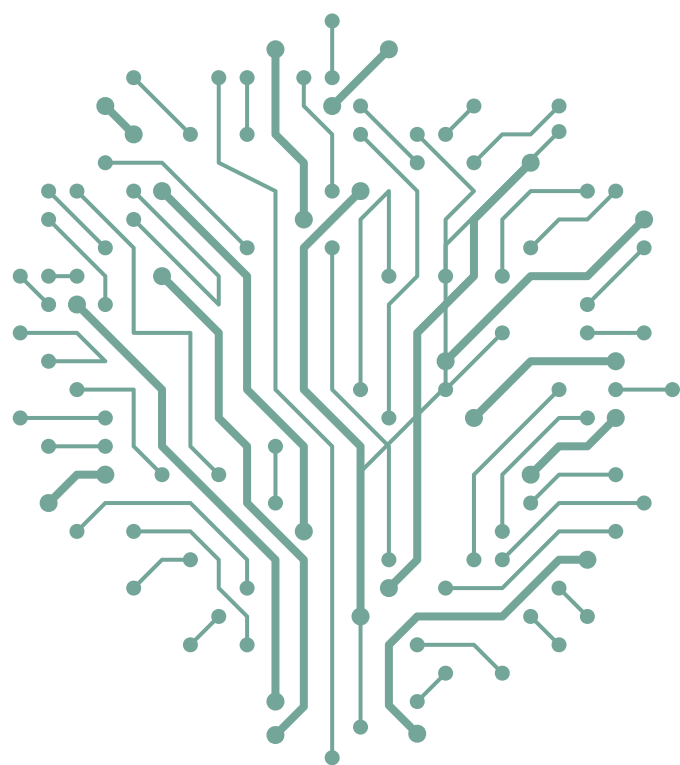
Jenny Whitlock is a lay preacher and lay presider in the Culcairn-Henty Uniting Church in the Riverina. She brings to her gentle leadership, a deep and inquisitive spirituality that finds God in nature, community-building, and acts of social justice.

Denise Wood is the Chairperson of Macquarie Darling Presbytery. She is a member of the Mudgee Uniting Church, involved in worship, music and candle making. Over recent years Denise has worked in Teacher Education at Charles Sturt University in Bathurst. Denise loves teaching, and enjoyed passing her passion onto new teachers in early childhood or primary. During those years Denise completed a Doctor of Philosophy, focussing on gifted rural girls, and the impact popular culture has on their development. Gifted education has long been her special interest. In early 2023 Denise 'retired', allowing her greater time to explore the joy in her role as chairperson and to engage with people and activities within the Synod.



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Editors Introduction: Discovering

Rev. Natasha He | Scattered Community Minister

Welcome to our Winter Edition of Ruminations with the theme of Discovering.

Discovery is the action or process of uncovering or finding something new, previously unknown, or unexpected. It involves exploring, investigating, and gaining knowledge or understanding about a particular subject, phenomenon, or area of interest. It often involves curiosity, experimentation, analysis, and the utilisation of different tools or methods to reveal information or insights that were previously hidden or undiscovered. The process of discovery can be exhilarating, as it opens up new possibilities, challenges existing beliefs, and expands our understanding of the world around us. It can lead to breakthroughs, advancements, and innovations that shape societies and propel progress in various domains. Discovery can also refer to the act of being found or recognised for one's talents, abilities, or achievements, thus bringing attention or acclaim to an individual or their work.

Discovery, whether it be through exploration, learning, or introspection, has always been a catalyst for my personal growth and development. It leads me down a path of self-reflection, allowing me to delve deep into my thoughts and emotions and understand who I am.



Natasha boating at Nambucca Heads, NSW



The more I learn about myself, the more I realize the interconnectedness between my personal growth and my spirituality. Discovering God's presence in my life brings me a deep sense of purpose and meaning. Self-discovery and the discovery of God go hand in hand, interweaving threads of love to shape my understanding of myself and the world around me.

Discovery can be a transformative journey that leads us to uncovering our true purpose in life. It involves delving deep into our passions, values, and aspirations, ultimately guiding us towards a path that aligns with our authentic selves. Along this path, we may also embark on a quest to seek our identity, unravelling the layers of our being and understanding who we truly are at our core. The Bible, can serve as a compass in this search for self-discovery, offering guidance and insight into our spiritual essence. By resonating with the message, lessons and passages in the Bible, we can find clarity, meaning, and a sense of belonging that helps us navigate life's challenges and make choices that align with our values. Discovery is a multifaceted process that encompasses both external exploration and internal reflection, leading us to a deeper understanding of ourselves and our place in the world.

Discovery, the winter edition of our Ruminations aims to celebrate these moments of enlightenment and share the stories of those who have embarked on their own journeys of exploration. We extend our heartfelt gratitude to all the contributors who have shared their insights, experiences, and perspectives, making this edition a rich tapestry of ideas and inspiration. May the articles ignite curiosity, provoke thought, and joy to all who engage with them.

Natasha



Wiradjuri Man - Murie-boy

Tom Sloane | Nanima Wellington UAICC

**Aboriginal Pastor & Artist Tom Sloane.
Wellington nanima UAICC
Wiradjuri Man Murie-boy.**

Growing as a young gallarri boy (meaning river people) I listen to many dream time stories that was told to me by my people and elders. these stories originated off a reserve back home in Condobolin. This reserve has a history, good and not so good, but the best part of growing up in those days was the stories that was told to me and many other Buurias (meaning young children). Some were scary, some were very entertaining and exciting and very memorable stories that I have never forgotten. So since then, I have painted and burned on canvas and timber, the stories my people have told me. It helps me to reflect and remember them and never forget where I come from. So now I share and tell my own stories passing on my knowledge and the characters and the attributes of these animals and what they mean in every day life.



I am currently the pastor of Nanima Wellington UAICC (UNITING ABORIGINAL ISLANDER CONGRESS CHURCH) and have been in the ministry now for 10 years. I became a Christian back in the (80,s) 1994 I attended Bimadeen Bible College in Cootamundra, where I completed the 3yr studies in Pastoral Ministries. It was long and hard. My comprehension wasn't all that flash, but I got by with a lot of prayer and quality time with God, and the help of the Holy Spirit that Jesus had promised to all those who believed in him. My wife then decided to do some studies for the next 2 years with me.

After 3 years we went back home to Condobolin, we got involved with ministry around Condobolin for awhile, then we felt God moving us on. I have always been a hands on man; motor maintenance, small building projects, as in out door furniture, welding, spray painting, and among many other skills. I've used these skills for outreaches to get along side others. I'm a man of action. I do what I see as ministry to share the gospel to others. I visit the sick in hospitals and in our community's. My family and I clean up yards around the community, mow lawns as this gives us an opportunity to get along side of people to share the gospel once again. I use my skills to do maintenance and repairs through out Wellington from time to time for the local land council, and the housing co-op. We connect with other churches and have gatherings with our mob from these churches. I utilise my skills and strengths to connect with people.



So I guess this is where some of the artefacts and my paintings come in, it helps me to understand what makes people tick, and I've been doing this ever since I can remember.



My paintings are based on God's creation. I am a father of 6 children, and 11 grandchildren who bring so much joy. Over the years I have passed my knowledge on to my children, encouraging them to be wise in there decision making.

Through out the years my children have learned of my birth place Condobolin. Part of my life we gathered much food at the murie. It's a reserve with a creek that runs for about 4 kilometres. Our people lived along this creek, living in tin shakes. Some had wooden claded boards for the walls, but these houses had dirt floors.

Our fathers worked on stations around the surrounding areas of Condobolin. They didn't bring home much, but we had enough to get by. A lot of our people learned from there elders how to survive on bush tucker and know the location of certain animals. We learned to survive on our bush tucker and bush medicine plantation that heals, and we still do today.

We had a variety of food in those days growing up and we still eat it today when our mob get together to celebrate.

Just to name some foods we used to eat:

- Goanna, we call it googar or narrang.
- fresh Water muscles, found in creek beds or the bottom of rivers.
- doobies (witchity grubs) we call tree grubs. they live in eucalyptus gum trees, and there was a certain way of getting them out of these trees and
- guuyas, means fish, yellow belly, cod, and catfish.
- yabbies or crayfish.

I play the diggeridoo, I carve them and make our artefacts. It's one of my passions about my culture. I also make boomerangs that fly. I tell stories of my own now through my paintings.

My eldest daughter now paints, she has a collection of her own. She has gone on in the foot steps of her father,



The Murie is a healing place for many of my people. We visit from time to time to reflect on our people from the past, it helps us to refocus and remember our past to the present, it's what I call dreamtime . This helps us to heal physically and mentally also spiritually.

This helps me to understand our people and communicate Gods creation through my paintings & artefacts. This way I'm able to minister in many ways to all kinds of people besides my mob about God through art and the stories that were told to me.

I hope to share more if needed and it is a pleasure to share hoping others may understand our people.

God Bless.
Tom Sloane.





Discovering the Kingdom of God

Rev. Geoff Flynn | Tamworth Uniting Church

A discovery bible study¹ consists of 4- 8 people who agree to meet on a regular basis. After checking in with one another, the scripture passage for the day is usually read several times preferably in different translations. Participants are then asked to tell the story in their own words. Once people are very familiar with the story, they move on to discuss the following questions:

- What does this story tell me about God?
- What does this story tell me about people (or myself)?
- If this is God's word for my life, how will I obey it?
- Who am I going to tell?

These questions promote an understanding of authority of scripture, as well as encouraging practical discipleship and evangelism.

Jesus often used parables, which are simple stories, to convey deeper spiritual truths and principles. In Matthew Chapter 13:44-45 we find an interesting pair of parables that emphasise the joy and worth of discovering the Kingdom of Heaven and the commitment required to fully embrace it.

Following the discovery bible study method, it is interesting to compare two translations.

⁴⁴ "The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and reburied; then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.

⁴⁵ "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant in search of fine pearls; 46 on finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it. (NRSVUV)

⁴⁴ "The Kingdom of Heaven is like a treasure that a man discovered hidden in a field. In his excitement, he hid it again and sold everything he owned to get enough money to buy the field.

1 [Discovery Bible Study – A safe place to see for yourself what the Bible says \(dbsguide.org\)](https://dbsguide.org)

⁴⁵ "Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant on the lookout for choice pearls. ⁴⁶ When he discovered a pearl of great value, he sold everything he owned and bought it! (NLT)



When it comes to interpreting this parable which word is better - discover or find? Perhaps it depends on the situation. If you are talking about uncovering something new or unknown, such as a scientific breakthrough or a hidden treasure, then discover is the appropriate word. However, if you are simply looking for a misplaced item or trying to locate a specific address, then find is the better choice.

What then do these parables tell us about God?

In a nutshell, this parable encourages believers to recognize the incomparable worth of the Kingdom of Heaven and to be willing to make any sacrifice necessary to be a part of it. A living relationship with God is invaluable.

What does this story tell me about people (or myself)?

This parable starts from the assumption that all people are greedy for wealth. And that greed is strong enough that it will tempt good people to swindle innocent people out of the wealth that is rightfully theirs.

A fundamental historic basis and legal principal for the colonization of Indigenous Peoples by European nations is the "Doctrine of Discovery", the idea that Christians enjoy a moral and legal right based solely on their religious identity to invade and seize indigenous lands and it treasures, and to dominate Indigenous Peoples.

Christopher Columbus was instructed, for example, to “discover and conquer,” “subdue” and “acquire” distant lands, and in 1493 Pope Alexander VI called for non-Christian “barbarous nations” to be subjugated and proselytized for the “propagation of the Christian empire.” Three years later, England’s King Henry VII followed the pattern of domination by instructing John Cabot and his sons to locate, subdue and take possession of the “islands, countries, regions, of the heathens and infidels . . . unknown to Christian people.” Thereafter, for example, English, Portuguese and Spanish colonization in Australia, the Americas and New Zealand proceeded under the Doctrine of Discovery as Europeans attempted to conquer and convert Indigenous Peoples.

In 2012 the World Council of Churches denounced the Doctrine of Discovery as fundamentally opposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ and as a violation of the inherent human rights that all individuals and peoples have received from God.²

The Mabo decision altered the foundation of land law in Australia by overturning the doctrine of terra nullius (land belonging to no-one) on which British claims to possession of Australia were based. This recognition inserted the legal doctrine of native title into Australian law in 1993.³

We are certainly not to obey God from a place of fear but from a genuine desire for reconciliation...

If this is God’s word for my lives, how will I obey it?

This is a crucial question for Christians who live in rural and regional Australia. How should I respond when I discover that my family or I have benefited from the Doctrine of Discovery even though I was not a person who directly dispossessed the indigenous people who were living here in Australia prior to the arrival of Europeans? We are certainly not to obey God from a place of fear but from a genuine desire for reconciliation with God and with one another, even if there is a personal cost to us.

A common interpretation of these parables is that Christ is the hidden treasure and that he is the pearl of great price. And as we go through life, we are the people who someday discover him. Then it is up to us to sell all that we have, give it all up, and buy him at any cost. But is that reading too much into the parables. No where in Scripture is salvation offered to us as something we have to buy, or can buy. We are absolute paupers in God’s sight. We have nothing to offer God, nothing that we can give in return.

2 Statement on the doctrine of discovery and its enduring impact on Indigenous Peoples
WCC Executive Committee 14-17 February 2012 Bossey, Switzerland

3 [Case summary: Mabo v Queensland | AIATSIS corporate website](#)

So could it be that the treasure in these parables is the secret of international peace, of harmony among the nations. You see, as our Lord Jesus Christ indicates, it is something related to the field, to humanity. And it is hidden within that human field so that Jesus had to buy the field to get the treasure. That treasure is the lost secret of how to get along with other nations, how to discover peace and prosperity and happiness and all the many results of peace that men and women have been seeking after for centuries.

These two parables are a call to action for believers to embark on a journey of spiritual discovery and to invest themselves fully in the treasures of the spiritual life. It's a powerful message about prioritizing spiritual wealth over material wealth, and it serves as a reminder that the pursuit of God's kingdom is worth more than any earthly possession.

So who am
I going to
tell?

So who am I going to tell?

That dear reader is a question that only you can answer.



A word from the Moderator

Rev. Mata Hiliau | Moderator

I often find myself looking around our Churches and grieving that our pews aren't full with young people. It's easy to catastrophise and conclude that the future of our Church is fading.

However, what I have discovered this year is the contrary - young people are flourishing in our Church, they're just not sitting in them.

I saw evidence of this at Retreat Yourself in February and was encouraged by the thoughtful young adult leaders who talked about their faith and the relevance of Jesus in their lives with conviction and grace. I saw hope for the future of our Church at the 200-strong intercultural gathering of eight-to-twelve-year-olds at Kids Camp Out.

Traditional models of connecting seem less resonant with the generation of youth and young adults raised on technology. I think that when we dismiss young people as disinterested because of the myriad of distractions, it overlooks a crucial truth: the future of the church hinges on our making sure we are engaging young people in a way that makes sense to them. So, it's up to us as the church to bridge this gap and foster thriving communities as well as nurture places of belonging for young people so they can explore, question and navigate their faith.



This can include fresh expressions of Church, like small group gatherings, utilising technology for worship and outreach, and generally creating more engaging experiences to explore faith and relationships.

Young people are passionate about making a difference in a world in conflict. Through advocacy, young people can express their faith and through action they see its real-world impact. We see evidence across this Synod of the advocacy work already being supported by Churches, embracing the challenges we face as communities of faith at home and across the globe.

Creating a vibrant youth community extends beyond our Sunday services. Events, social gatherings, and retreats foster friendships and a sense of belonging. Young people crave a space where they can connect with peers who share their values and navigate life's challenges together.

Churches should be a welcoming space for all, regardless of background, beliefs, or sexual orientation.



By adapting to changing needs, embracing technology, and fostering a community of authenticity and action, Churches can bridge the gap and inspire young leaders. The Uniting Church has a unique opportunity to offer young people a sense of purpose and belonging in a rapidly changing world.

My prayer for this Synod and indeed the whole Uniting Church is that by embracing change and fostering genuine connections, our mission to connect the Church and young people can be strengthened, ensuring a vibrant future for generations to come.

Mata



A little story of love and gratitude

Nathan Tyson | Director, First Peoples Strategy and Engagement

While I felt compelled to write something about the myth of Captain Cook “discovering” Australia, and the legal fiction of Terra Nullius as applied to the Australian continent, I will resist. To be honest I am just too tired at present to summon the energy that writing such a piece takes.

So I will write about a different type of discovery I recently made. A story of discovery of the power of God, faith and love.

Since I was young enough to remember going to the local Catholic church with my Nan, I have known of God. I attended a Marist Fathers run boarding school for 6 years in High School and got to know God better – at least I got to hear lots of sermons about God.

In recent years I have worked for the Uniting Church and have become a member of the Uniting Church – again, discovering new things about the church and about God.

However, it was my study of theology in the last couple of years that has really helped me to find strength in my faith and to understand God better. I may have always known about God, but I have learned about the role I play as a follower of Christ. My role is to love God, to love my neighbour as myself, and care for the least... or at least to try my hardest to do so, as I still struggle to love those who hurt people.

So to get to the story... Recently somebody sent me an abusive text message in the early hours of the morning. I will not go into details, but it was unwarranted, nasty, and it hurt. For much of my life my usual response would have been to go on the attack and fire back – as a lawyer with three decades of advocacy and negotiation experience, I am well equipped for conflict. But this time I paused. I thought about my faith. I thought about the parable of the Good Samaritan, and about how Jesus told us that the second greatest commandment is to love our neighbour. So while I did point out that the text was offensive, rather than fire back with an attack, I asked for an apology.



I waited for about 2 weeks as my text was not read, and then for another 2 weeks after I knew it had been read. After 4 weeks, no apology had been received. I was still quite hurt, and I was getting angrier as the weeks passed – but I prayed some more. I decided I would send one more request for an apology.

Two days later I received the apology. I was grateful. I was able to then respond with thanks, and to reconcile a relationship that was in real jeopardy. I was grateful to God for helping guide me and giving me patience. I was grateful that Jesus taught us to love our neighbour, and that I was able to turn to find strength in my faith.

In hindsight, I think this was a test of faith. It is easy to say we love God, and easy to say we will love our neighbour when we think of those neighbours we know and care about. It is much more difficult to love those who hurt or upset you, or who are not like you for some reason. It was quite difficult to resist the urge to engage in conflict, and to instead allow space for love. But in the end, it was worth it.

It is worth “discovering” the teachings of Christ, or perhaps re-discovering them. I have greatly enjoyed studying theology, as it has refreshed my faith and helped me to more deeply understand my relationship with God. Hopefully it will also make me a better human – one who more easily resorts to love than conflict – as we all need to be the change we want to see in the world. May peace be with you.

*I may have
always known
about God, but
I have learned
about the role I
play as a follower
of Christ.*



Our journey of discovery

Jenny Rose | Hillston-Gunbar Uniting Church

Hillston-Gunbar consists of four linked congregations: Merriwagga, Goolgowi, Gunbar, and Hillston spread over 94 road ks. When our last ministry agent retired in 2002, we felt isolated, bereft, and helpless. The congregation asked, "Do we join the Baptists or the Anglicans". I was not prepared to just give up, so suggested we wait to discover what God wanted us to do. So began our journey of discovery.

Turramurra Uniting released their minister, Steve Everist for 10 days. Steve held a variety of training workshops and encouraged us to step out in faith. Turramurra UC congregation generously bought us a collection of sermon and worship resources. The Rev. Jan Reeve also spent 10 days of her leave ministering to us with her gentle pastoral care. We were blessed. We discovered we had brothers and sisters in the wider church who wanted to help small, struggling rural churches. Friendships were formed.

The Rev. Niall Read, and Northmead congregation were frequent and welcome visitors.

Our confidence grew, we discovered God was with us, thawing out His frozen assets. Sacraments were celebrated, babies Baptized, marriages solemnized, and funerals presided over. We learnt from our mistakes and discovered joy in ministry replaced fear.

Our congregations grew in numbers, so did gifted worship leaders. Not having to meet a stipend, we could afford to share God's love in community. We housed the homeless, fed the hungry, 'random acts of kindness' flourished and spread.

There is a strong community spirit in Hillston. One aged local man died. He had no close relatives and no money for a burial. The hospital planned to send him away for cremation. Joe, my husband produced a homemade coffin. Children painted 'hands of friendship' on the lid. The community donated \$10,089 and food for a wake. His life was honoured, and body laid to rest where he belonged.



Hillston church hall was used for social connections: community film nights, English as a second language classes, Yoga and Bible study.

Over the years our congregation numbers dwindled, key leaders moved and most of these activities ceased. When all looks a little lost and forsaken God shows a new way forward.

I suggested we trial 'Family Church in the park' as an outreach to people who have no or little connection with church. We couldn't do this on our own so invited representatives from the combined churches in Hillston to join us. The idea was enthusiastically embraced. Every 5th Sunday, Easter, Christmas, and times in between when a mission group visits, we hold Family Church in the park. Worship is planned and shared between Hillston churches. There is a puppet play, craft for children, and sausage sizzle to encourage people linger and form relationships. We have had up to 80-100 adults and lots of children attending.



Any death is a sad occasion, but my toughest challenge is ministry in the midst of traumatic grief. I think we all dread the death of a baby/child, a suicide or accidental death of a young person.

I remember how inadequate I have felt about caring pastorally for heartbroken families and planning funerals for their babies or children. I would pray that God would give me comforting words to say. None ever came. All I could do was to weep with parents as they showed tiny hand, footprints and locks of downy hair.

...God does not ask us to do the things that are naturally easy for us.

As I left their homes, in some strange way, the mothers would seem comforted, thank me for the visit, and tell me how much better they felt....and I could not begin to fathom how that could be.

Later, a grief workshop led by the Rev Dr Peter Powell, taught the importance of listening and entering the story of grief, anger, and despair. To be a presence, to be patient, (this can take a long time), and when people are ready to talk, they will tell you what they need.

I realised that God had been present at these difficult times, an arm around my shoulders and a hand over my mouth.

A couple of years ago I was asked to cleanse a community football field in a nearby town of 'dark spirits', which the locals believed inhabited the place after someone had suicided there. It had ceased to be used.

I reached out to the late Annette Hawken and Yvonne Ghavalas for help. Yvonne produced a beautiful liturgy of prayers and creative ideas using air, water, light, and earth. It went well, and the recreational ground is again in full use and enjoyed by all.

Last week I sat with the parents of an 11-year-old whose death was accidental. I listened to their broken-hearted rage at God as they wrestled with questions that have no answers. I was instructed there were to be no prayers, no Scripture and God's name was not to be mentioned at the graveside service, but I could speak of heaven.

It was the toughest, saddest funeral that I had ever presided over. As I came to the committal I found the words: 'let us proceed in peace as we commit NNN's body to the good earth, which she loved to wear on her hands, face and clothing. We look backwards with gratitude, forwards with courage and upwards with confidence as we lift our faces to where we imagine heaven to be'. Two doves, symbols of peace, hope and healing, were released by the brothers. The birds circled the grieving crowd for quite some time and the transforming calm of God's Spirit descended.

I've discovered God does not ask us to do the things that are naturally easy for us.

God only asks us to be willing and available to do the things that we are perfectly fit to do through his grace. We are not alone, we have the Holy Spirit, and we have each other, in the laying down our life for another. In the words of Stuart Townend's song*

**My heart is filled with thankfulness
To him who walks beside
Who floods my weaknesses with strength
And causes fears to fly
Whose every promise is enough
For every step I take
Sustaining me with arms of love
And crowning me with grace.**

**From the album The Best of Stuart Townend*



Discovery in the wild landscape of Tasmania

Jenny Whitlock | Henty Culcairn Uniting Church

Recently my husband and I had the wonderful experience of “doing a lap of Tassie”. This was such a renewing and refreshing adventure, with so many discoveries. We had been previously - about 20 years ago, however that time had 3 busy little boys with us so this time we saw so much more (I wonder why!!)

From the beautiful coast line of the Northwest to the ruggedness of the west coast to the beautiful Huon valley south and the spectacular coast of the east. We loved the magnificent giant old growth forests and the tall timbers of the plantations. Some old growth giant trees must be hundreds of years old we saw some up to 90metres high. Walking in these cool climate rain forests was like walking on sacred ground. God is in this place. We saw seals, sea eagles and the largest pod of dolphins we’ve ever seen, and wombats wandering lazily in the bush, and curious pademelons, – so cute. No devils though...

It is truly a scenic state but there was more... the history. So many quaint villages with old, old buildings each with their own story, many of which we heard or read about.



We learnt more about the dark history of the beginning of white settlement, with its hard hearted leaders, in the Victorian era way of thinking and its heroes, like Mr Hoy the ship builder. He taught convicts the trade of building the best ships in the world from Huon pine in the penal settlement of Sarah Island.... possibly the harshest place on earth yet building the best ships afloat. Stories of the demonstrations and covert operations that saved the Franklin and Gordon Rivers and which lead to the first political party based on the environment.

What we heard was the indigenous story, sadly how so many were killed or rounded up and sent to live on Flinders Island, but now many are working with government and other organisations to preserve the heritage and acknowledge these first peoples who have lived in Tasmania for over 40,000 years. Just think about that, Christ walked on the earth just over 2,000 years ago.... our indigenous people have cared for and inhabited "country" for over 40,000 years.

We were touched by the friendliness of everyone from the accommodation hosts, shop attendants, pub staff, even the service station attendants who fill up your car for you... all the while, chatting. It wasn't only the tourist operators who were friendly, it seemed everyone was.... even the lady living in the only farm house for miles when we needed to get directions as we were hopelessly lost on forest tracks but that's another story!!



The song that kept coming to mind was "What a Wonderful World"... and what an amazing imagination our Creator God has!!! It was also a humbling experience and a reminder that we walk for such a short time on this journey we call life, and how we choose to use that time.

What I really want to tell you about are the bees. All through the bush and forests, pine and blue gum plantations which are spectacular, we discovered bee hives. They seemed to be everywhere especially on the west coast. Then we discovered Leatherwood Honey or liquid gold. It's delicious with a strong flavour and is unique to Tasmania.

We can learn a lot from bees I discovered. They are true conservationists only taking what they need and leaving plants unharmed. Bees work together, mind you, most of the worker bees in the hive are female. All the bees in the hive have their special responsibilities – worker bees, house bees, honey gathers, when they retire they become the guard bees using all their knowledge and experience gained during their lifetime and the queen bee. She is the mother of the whole hive. She is so busy laying eggs, up to 2,000 a day that she depends on the worker bees to clean and feed her.

Bees communicate by dancing (now that sounds fun) telling one another where food is... pollen and nectar, this saves time. Bees use the sun as a compass and can see the sun even on hazy days.

Bees do nothing but good things to the plant community. They have a special relationship with many plants and many plants need visits from bees in order to produce seeds. Every time you crunch into an apple you should think about bees.



Discovery
teaches us,
informs us even
enlightens us

It was the bees flying from blossom to blossom on the apple tree which spread the pollen, which eventually led to the formation of the apple.

The Leatherwood tree which is endemic to Tasmania grows very slowly, trees under 75 years old have few to no flowers, while trees that are 175 to 210 years old produce the most flowers. So who says age is a barrier!!!

Discovery can happen every day – not only in Tasmania. Discovery teaches us, informs us even enlightens us and I believe within discovery we encounter God. God of the wild is with us, guiding us through nature, people, circumstances, even bees and trees.



Discovering 'The Way'

Denise Wood | Mudgee Uniting Church

In beginning to put my reflections on *discovering* onto paper I looked it up – what does discovering mean according to a dictionary. Definitions included '*to make known or visible, to find unexpectedly, or to become aware of*'. Unsurprising – there was no new discovery there. Next I let my mind wander and the words that came to mind were *curious, finding out, uncovering, exploring, seeking*.

And so I have set out to explore, here, my curiosity about what I uncovered as we walked the Portuguese coastal Camino in March and April this year. It was a trip I had imagined for a number of years and planned carefully for 12 months. That in itself was a discovery- my usual approach to travel has been to let others plan it, and I simply turn up, bags packed and ready to go!

Discovery One: the impact of pathways. As I walked, the impact of different pathways filled my mind. Sometimes it was cobblestones, at others it was smooth pavement, or beautiful arrangements of stone in patterns far more interesting than our square cement paths. Pathways strewn with bark and leaves wet from the rain and silent as we walked, our feet making no sound. Mud – thick, black, sticky – clinging to boots and poles. Stony paths that turned to creeks and mini waterfalls as we walked along them. Challenging pathways that required great cognitive effort to puzzle out the next step to take, the safest route. Tarmac and smooth cement. Sand and grass. Steps. Old granite roads with wheel ruts from carts in distant times. Granite bridges across rivers and creeks. Each pathway impacts the way we walk, and the ease with which the goal can be reached. Each pathway raises challenges and may slow our progress or speed it up. I pondered pathways – between the choices we make, the times when there is no choice but to follow the path in front of us, and the impact it has on our faith. I am left with a great in a journey of faith.



Discovery Two: physical strength, persistence and capacity to go beyond – the ability of my body to walk the distance (and the hills) was a source of wonder and empowerment. All who know me know that, in reality, I am not an exercise aficionado. I enjoy a walk but if it is raining or chilly I'm the first to say no. Day one of our Camino began well, cloudy and drizzly. We set off with excitement, curious if we could walk 23 km in a day and wondering what we'd find. By lunchtime rain set in, then hail and wind – up to 80km hour. We walked right along the coast – waves, storm clouds and wind. And I discovered that it was awesome! For 3 days the rain continued and I learned to keep my head down, to remove my glasses and to enjoy a moment in the shelter of a building before heading off again. There were moments of joy when a rainbow appeared, or when I watched a storm out to sea blow in and around. Creation is filled with beauty and I felt God in the noise and water and in the discovery of my physical ability to put one foot in front of another for 8 hours, and just keep going. I discovered wonder at the power of creation that kept throwing new things at me and wonder at my physical self to manage.



Discovery three: the discovery of peace in and with myself, an acceptance that I have more questions than answers, especially about my direction going forward. Each new place was an opportunity to learn, each day a chance to seek to understand the Spirit in me, and a direction into the future. A key element of any Camino is a yellow arrow – painted on posts, buildings, roads, signs, embedded in the road, or attached to a wall. One simply follows the arrows. This gave rise to tremendous peace, but sometimes worry when we didn't see one for a while. The arrows pointed the way – symbols from long ago, newer ones in places where for safety the original path has been diverted. A simple yellow arrow – and I am now seeking those arrows in my daily life. What is God showing me – pointing me toward? How frequent do those arrows need to be to allay my fears, ease my anxiety about my next steps? Peace came when I learned to trust the arrows, to know they would show the way. It's not about blindly following but faithfully knowing that the arrows are along the way, sometimes obvious, sometimes less so.



A fourth discovery was that it doesn't stop when you get there. Since returning I find Camino moments in many places. I rejoice as I walk a distance and feel the strength in my body and in my mind. I have re-discovered the value of reflection and writing and have committed to being more intentional about it.



A Camino promises all sorts of discoveries and I have decided it is better not to have set too many goals as you set out. Following the footsteps of those who have come before – recently and long ago - and connecting with others on the way creates an unending chain of seekers, and reminds me that we are always on a journey of discovery – that when we open ourselves to what emerges each day, we discover anew the pathways of faith.

Discovery doesn't stop when you end the journey. Discovering is the way of faith- new paths, new weather, new challenges. Curiosity keeps us seeking – and this is perhaps the biggest re-discovery for me. I have uncovered a desire to seek further, to explore more deeply, to challenge myself to take the next step, to follow different and difficult pathways. I have discovered for me what it means to identify myself as a pilgrim.

Discovery
doesn't stop
when you end
the journey.



Embracing the Call of the Dark

Tash Holmes | Uniting Creative

'The cave you fear to enter holds the treasure you seek' (Joseph Campbell)

Tell me about the stars...

The sparkle of wonder in a sea of darkness.

A galaxy of ancient wisdom.

The divine connection to spirit.

A gentle light of comfort when sinking into the shadows.

Do they call to you at night?

Do they reach out to you saying, 'We would not shine the way we do without the darkness'?

I've discovered something about the dark. We can travel the world in search of the new and the profound, but there is nothing quite as exposing as when the lights go out.

I used to be afraid of the dark.

Following a traumatic life experience, I could not be at peace in the dark, for it was too glaring and the quiet, too noisy.

My soul was awakening - I could no longer cling to the comfort found in the light. In the silence, I could hear whispers of resilience and endurance; beauty stirring from deep chasms of turmoil. But, I pushed back on this call of the night.

I filled my time with 'doing' and turned away from 'being'. Only, the tender tug of gentle light was insistent. As the threshold of dusk crept in each day, I could hear the beating of my heart pull me into the shadows that I had dared not venture.

Why is it that we wrestle so much with the things that will bring us relief?



Sometimes, you don't choose to enter into darkness, you just stumble in.

However you arrive, or however long it takes,

look up.

In the vast expanse of the night, I saw a reflection of myself among the stars. There, amidst the backdrop of blackness and emptiness, I found solace in the cosmic storytellers. With each sparkle, they wove intricate tales of creation and destruction, of birth and rebirth, of endings and beginnings.

As I gazed upon them, their light filled my soul, piercing through the cracks of my being. Their ancient stories whispered of resilience, of the eternal cycle of life, and of the infinite possibilities of the cosmos that lay beyond the confines of my own suffering. In their gentle glow, I found healing. I found hope. And, I found a renewed sense of connection.

And so, I surrendered to the enchantment of the stars, allowing their brilliance to illuminate my path. It unleashed a sense of wonder that unravels the bonds that tether you to the ground. Allow the night sky to beckon you towards adventure, healing, self-discovery and transformation.

As you sit in the darkness and feel its gentle pull, surrender to the treasure that awaits.





News from Saltbush

Rev. Mark Faulkner | Saltbush Ministry Team Leader

As we enter into winter and this season's edition of Ruminations the Saltbush team send our greetings to all our readers and those we meet with along the way throughout our rural and coastal regions. We are mindful of the breadth of our church and value the ways you invite our team into your lives and journeys of church and faith.

The months ahead will be vibrant for Saltbush as we have three Saltbush Gatherings; (Dubbo in June, Coleambally in September and Lismore in November), our annual ordained ministries and lay ministry of Pastor retreat and our UTC / Saltbush rural explore with the UTC students in Dubbo and the Central West. These times of joy and relationship sit alongside our ongoing ministry both on the ground and online as well as the other work and dwelling days with UME.

Of course, Ruminations has been and is our publication that tells the life and faith stories of people from all places and walks of life. We try to make each publication an opportunity for pondering alongside learning and listening. We are going to trial an opportunity of readers to send in your letters, experiences and even photos. Simply send in your letters or experiences (under 200 words) and your photos here: (we will select a few for each edition)

Reader's Letters – Experiences – Photos

saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au

Our website is a gateway to the Saltbush team including our weekly visual messages around the lectionary, our events including online café's and gatherings, our latest edition of Ruminations and connection to our conversations for group and congregations around the challenges of being the church in our current context.

Our website (Saltbushcommunity.uca.org.au) has around 2000 visits each month and between 50-100 people using it each day. To take a look you can scan here:



Our next Gathering is on Saturday 7th. September in Coleambally from 9am – 4pm. Our Saltbush Gatherings are open to anyone who would like to come along and are not limited to people from any particular region or Presbytery. You can come along in person or join us for the day on Zoom (although you miss out on the sandwiches)! Saltbush Gatherings are not meetings, but times of worship, community, conversation and discussion and hospitality.

Saltbush Gathering – Coleambally (Riverina)
Saturday 7th. September
9am-4pm (Lunch provided)
Free

Keep an eye out here to register to attend, either in person or on zoom:
<https://saltbushcommunity.uca.org.au/community-events/>

We also encourage you to join our growing Saltbush community on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/Saltbushcommunity/>.

Remember, the Saltbush team are in ministry with you and we welcome contact at any time.

Mark .



Reader's Letters - Experiences - Photos

We'd like to hear from you!

Send in a story of up to 200 words, or photo with caption to:
saltbush@nswact.uca.org.au*

This can either be on the theme of Discovering, or on the theme of our Spring/
Summer edition which will be Promises.

*We will endeavour to include as many stories as possible, but cannot guarantee
all submissions will be published.



Saltbush Relational Resources

Saltbush Cafés

In regular series of three or four nights the Saltbush team hold online cafés centred around diverse themes or readings. Saltbush cafés are easy to attend, relaxed and an encouraging way to meet other and explore life and faith together.

Scattered Community Gatherings

Three to four times a year in different rural or coastal location the Saltbush team hold Scattered Community Gatherings. You can also attend these online from wherever you are to wherever we are. These gatherings are centred around worship, encouragement, education and the practice of discipleship.

Word around the Bush

Each week of the year the Saltbush team present a visual message based on the lectionary reading for that week. You are free to watch and use in your own congregation this message. You can also print off the Saltbush liturgy that is provided each week to accompany the visual message.

Talking about Salt

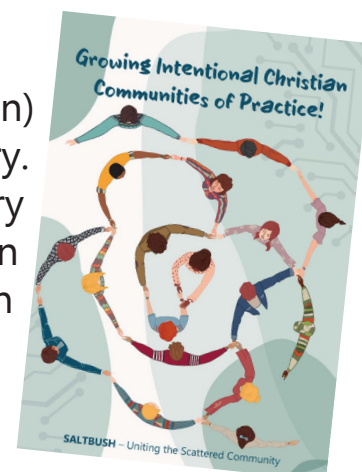
This is our publication available for any congregation or group who are willing to have some discussion around who you are, how you gather and how you live out your faith. Talking about Salt is five difficult conversations for congregations and can also be used to shape a life and witness discussion and consultation. Talking about Salt is available free to any congregation and is available both online and in post.



Intentional Christian Communities

This is our publication available for any congregation or group who are willing to think about the challenge of being intentional in how we gather as the Christian community.

Dive into any part of the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke & John) and you will find Jesus intentionally going about his ministry. At times it looks like chaos and no doubt it was, but at every step Jesus acts with intention. Growing Intentional Christian Communities of Practice is available free to any congregation and is available both online and in post.



The Great Unravelling

The Saltbush team have prepared six conversations as part of our reading of the book:

Joining God in the Great Unravelling by Alan J. Roxburgh.

However, these conversations are not a study guide to the book, but an invitation to open ourselves to deeply consider who and how we, the church, our christian communities, are participating in the ways of God beyond ourselves.



Digital packages for congregations

If your congregation would like a Saltbush digital package so that you can use and connect with us and the wider church please simply get in touch. A digital package includes: smart tv, mobile stand for the tv, all connectors and cables, TV, camera and our support to set it all up.

Visits

The Saltbush team are always willing to visit your congregation or group to meet you, talk with you about how it is for you as a congregation or Christian community and how you seek to be part of the missional relationship with others. Simply get in touch and one of the Saltbush team will come to visit you.

Look on our website under **Word, Ruminations, Talking about Salt** or **Contact Us**.

Thanks for your donations to Saltbush!

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 congregations and people in scattered communities of faith.

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
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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.

Editors: Mark Faulkner
Geoff Wellington
Tim Jensen
Peter Overton
Yvonne Ghavalas
Natasha He
Monique Potter

Uniting the Scattered Community

PO Box 648 Canberra City, 2601

0477 720 151

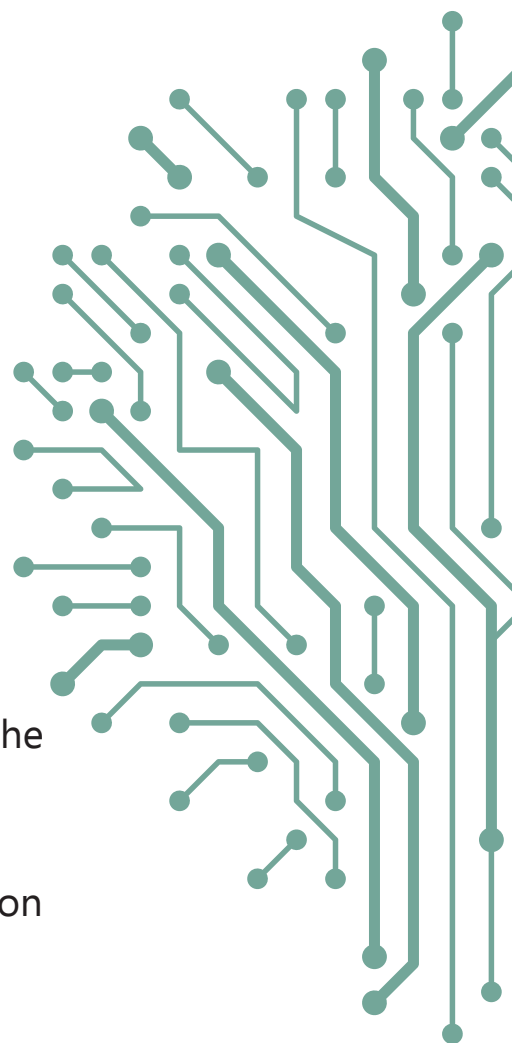
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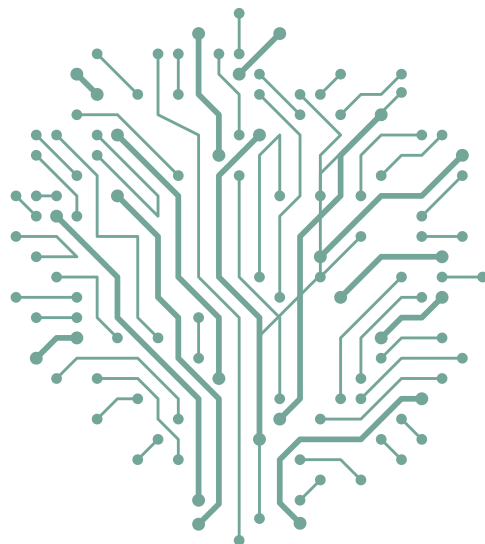
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