

WELCOME

Welcome all to another worship space with HopeNet SA. Grant Jewell with you today for HNSA. May God bless our time together.

PRAYER

Lord our God, thank you for giving us your Son. Jesus' ability to be special to each one of us comes from you, as you know us so well. Psalm 139:7—14 reminds us that you are familiar with all our ways, therefore your Son joins us with that knowledge and understanding.

Bless our shared time, Lord, and may our thoughts and desires be acceptable in your sight, our Lord and redeemer.

Amen

PSALM 139: 7-14

Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens , you are there: if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea. Even then your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. If I say "surely the darkness will hide and the light become night around me" even the darkness will not be dark to you, the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. For you created my inmost being, you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

SONG *by Charles A Miles 1913* (John 20:15-16)

1. I come to the garden alone, while the dew is still on the roses
And the voice I hear falling on my ear the son of God discloses
*And he walks with me, and he talks with me, and he tells me I am his own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there none other has ever known*
2. He speaks, and the sound of his voice, is so sweet the birds hush their singing,
And the melody that he gave to me within my heart is ringing.
3. I'd stay in the garden with him, though the night around me be falling,
But he bids me go; through the voice of woe His voice to me is calling

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LUKE 2:1-15

In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. (This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria)). And everyone went to their own town to register. So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, in Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. He went to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no guest room available for them. And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord

appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you: he is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." Suddenly a company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying "Glory to God in heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests." When the angels had left them, and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So we reflect upon Christmas, and the familiar story of the nativity, including the search for shelter, symbolising the world's rejection of Christ. The story takes on new meaning for those of us seeking to know Christ in our lives today. The shepherds went about their business, remote, unclean and disconnected. Their call to welcome the Messiah reflects God's call to the world. Regardless of who or where you are, He wants you to be a part of Immanuel. How does Jesus find a place in our lives today?

"Making room in the Inn of our hearts also means examining our lives as we live them today" (Archbishop O'Regan). What preoccupies us? What is it that consumes us at times so fully that there is no room for others, or for the Christ-- longing to be included.

Christmas day, in our family, like many others, is a big deal especially with our nine grandies waiting to open gifts . This year we asked them to spell the word 'presents', then the word 'presence' = Immanuel before they began tearing paper.

Is the world truly aware of the real meaning of Christmas? Sadly I wonder, even in so called Christian countries like ours, the U S A, U K, Germany etc there is an ever diminishing awareness of the coming of Jesus. It has been suggested that Germany will be Islamic within 30 years, and the U K not far behind. (Both places the birthplace of protestant Christianity.) In those, and perhaps Australia also, there is a growing Presence of Islam (Islamic Courts et al.) But not only Islam, also other fast growing faith communities Hindu, Sikh, and others.

In Adelaide's eastern suburbs an Anglican church is now the principal worship place for the Sikh Community. In the developing suburbs to Adelaide's north I have seen open housing land with not a house built yet, but with a massive Buddhist temple standing tall in the middle of the newly planned suburb (where is the church plant??).

How can we (the Church) present Christ to the community, in such a way that engages people? May I now share a little of my own journey?

Luke 24: 13—19, 28—33

This is the Jesus I have known since coming to faith at the age of 13 at Birkenhead Methodist, and renewal at Emmaus circa 1999.

1. He draws near: The disciples are on the run away from events in Jerusalem- fearful, confused, sad..... Jesus understood the need just as he does in our lives in the hard times.

2. Jesus walks alongside listening to their struggle, understanding the need, but also reminding them of their slowness in remembering God's promise

3. He joins them in their search for meaning: "What things?" Like Cleopas, we are not alone in our search (compare also Thomas John 20:26). Yes, Jesus gently told Thomas that faith without evidence is truly blessed. But he still loved Thomas and allowed him to satisfy his request, his "search". See also 1 Peter:1 8—9

4. Jesus wants to be invited, “a room in the inn of their hearts” (v28/29). Ever wondered why Jesus made as if to go another way? I think it was a test of their willingness to share. I think that our Lord walked on, inside hoping against hope for their call to him. Have they learnt anything, will they call. Could that be the call to today’s world also?

5. He shares with them breaking the bread (v30) and He returns to the eleven in Jerusalem (where he is needed!)

The Jesus in this narrative is the one I have come to know, and the one I like to share, inviting others to allow him to walk with them, and to join them in life’s struggles. It has been a powerful ministry tool. I recall spending the day with a truck driver, whose wife was a church member. He allowed me to draw near, and to hear a story of grief and loss. He shared at length over the day, and later asked to be baptised. What a blessing!! The Emmaus Jesus gives us so much that we can share with a troubled world AND it is unique to **the Christian faith**.

So that is the good news, but not all of it. A recent survey by McCrindle Research found that although overall Church numbers are still down, there has been some encouraging trends:

- The percentage of Australians attending church at least monthly has risen from 15% in 2011, to 21.5% IN 2021
- THE % of Australians who are warm toward Christianity has risen from 58% in 2011 to 65% in 2025.
- No less than 784,000 who ticked “no” to religion in the 2016 census went on to tick Christian in the 2021 census.

I believe that to reach “seekers” Luke’s Emmaus record ranks very highly in being Jesus to YOU.

A final point. The newly appointed Pope Leo 14 sounded quite evangelical in his first Encyclical. He asked: “Do you go to mass to meet Jesus?”

The Church cannot rely on past tradition or ritual to go forward today. Rev Dr Martyn Atkins, Cliff (Methodist) College of evangelism (UK) said the only form of evangelism that works is relational Evangelism. Again that is as I understand the Luke 24 account.

HYMN: *by John Bowring 1792—1872*

1. In the Cross of Christ I glory, towering o’er the wrecks of time;
All the lights of sacred story gathers round its head sublime
2. Through the cross Christ’s love empowers us, worldliness and self deny
By his Spirit it inspires us, Him through love to glorify.
3. When the woes of life o’ertake us hopes deceive and fears annoy,
Never shall the Cross forsake us, from it shines our peace and joy.

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Prayer for the lost and the persecuted:

Lord, God of all, Saviour of many, and many more we pray, enrich our lives, and enable us to be your word, and to carry your son’s message to a hungry, seeking world. Grant us your peace as we go about finding the courage, and the opportunities to share .

Our thoughts turn to Pakistan where Christians are held in contempt, Nigeria where they are shot.

Father, bless those who struggle, in Jesus’ name we pray. Amen.

Blessing:

And now may the Lord bless you and keep you, may his face shine upon you and give each one peace, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Amen

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