



***Transformed by Grace to Love
One Another, to Serve the City,
and to Share Christ***

**FROM THE RECTOR -
Rev Dr MICHAEL JENSEN**

What will St Mark's look like in the age of coronavirus and after?

Things have changed - of that we can be sure. And some of that change has been difficult and unpleasant. It's been really hard to have our habits of church-going changed. There are people - my dear brothers and sisters in Christ - whom I haven't seen since March this year. Church without the joy of singing together and with the requirement of having to sit far apart is certainly not what I know church to be. And having to set up a bunch of extra rules to govern our meeting together can take the attention away from why we are there - to encourage one another in Jesus Christ.

But at the same time, we must remember that St Mark's has been called by God precisely for times like this. A recent article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* noted that an increased number of people in the community said that they had been praying regularly during this year. The spiritual hunger - and anxiety - of our community is stronger than it was. Our neighbours need the love of God for them in Jesus Christ more than ever - and are more ready than ever to receive it. Our task as the people of God in this place is more urgent than ever. And I am confident in his strength and his kindness.

So what will we be doing? With your support, we've had to find new ways of connecting with

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one another - not just on Sundays, but during the week. We've had to learn how to broadcast our services to those who can't be with us in person. We've had to run groups on Zoom as well as groups in person. We've had to be more consistent with online giving. We've had to be even more welcoming of newcomers. We've had to rely more on God in prayer.

But these are all wonderful things to have learnt! It's been a great encouragement to hear of people calling each other to see how they are going, and to see how much enthusiasm there has been for our campaigns to assist our mission partners at Rough Edges and Living Water. I was overwhelmed with the positive response of people to my recent 'Read the Bible in 90 Days' challenge. The response to our previous quarterly giving campaign was likewise a great sign of God's grace. I think God has used this time to grow our church as a connected community.

The challenge before us is to keep our ministry going forward in the midst of uncertainty. And for this, we need to join together: in prayer, in active service of one another, and in financial support. If we are to weather the storm and to live out our calling, we will need to be attentive in these three areas. In particular, we need your continued support so that we can hand on the gospel to the next generation. Will you partner us in this great mission?

Blessings

Michael Jensen



HOMECOMING 2020



HOMECOMING REFLECTIONS

These last few weeks of church have been a homecoming. After being unable to meet for so long, we have returned home to our churches to meet with each other and with our God.

But there's something about homecomings that are never quite what we expect. They can be a beautiful time of re-establishing life, but things are often not what you expect it to be.

Returning to church has been a bit like this. On the one hand, it is a time of joy and celebration to see each other again, to open and listen to God's word together, to pray with one voice and to express our unity in the Spirit. So we give great thanks to God. And yet, it's not what we might hope. Only some of us are there, only one of us can sing, we sit at a distance, can't embrace each other, and our smiling faces are covered with masks.

In the book of Ezra, God's people experience their own mixed homecoming. After spending a generation in exile, they return to their homeland to rebuild with anticipation and joy. God fulfills his promises and works through them to successfully rebuild the temple and restore heartfelt, loving worship of their God. And yet things aren't as they were, nor as they hoped. Only some of the people return to the land, the new temple is not quite what the old one was, and they struggle to remain united and faithful to their God.

The experience of God's people in the book of Ezra distils a persistent experience of God's people. God's church has always experienced varying degrees of joy and disappointment. The Pandemic has magnified what has always

been true: even though we are on our way home, home isn't yet what we hope it will be.

So, in this time, our task at St Mark's is a lot like that of Ezra and his compatriots, as it always has been. In the face of increased difficulty and uncertainty, we wait for God's final restoration. Like them, we seek to live in obedience to God, living holy and repentant lives of worship. We resist discouragement by holding fast to the word and promises of God, and giving thanks for his many gifts. And we keep working faithfully with him, having our hands strengthened by our God, towards the building of his coming kingdom.

Rev Dr Tim Escott



PARENTING COURSE

This year we launched the Parenting Course on Zoom. As families found themselves spending more time together over the lock-down period and onwards, we wanted to provide a practical way of providing tools and facilitating conversations on how parents can continue to develop their relationships with their children. These family-course ministries are a strategic way to fulfil our church mission statement ("Transformed by grace to love one another, serve the city, and to share Christ") by reaching out to provide a genuine service to our broader community. Many of the parenting course participants were invited by friends and neighbours of St Mark's members.

Positive feedback has included "This course has been a precious time for Ben and I to talk about how we can improve as parents. Thank you!" (Fabi and Ben). Thanks to Trish Howes for her contribution of time and expertise in helping to facilitate the course.



**JOIN US FOR LIFE
EXPLORED ON ZOOM
Thursdays 7pm – 8pm
17 September – 29 October 2020**

In September Michael Jensen and Erica Oliver will be running an exciting initiative on Zoom, Life Explored. Much like Alpha the course looks at the bigger questions of meaning and faith. Everyone wants to know, where does happiness come from? Life Explored opens up the Bible's story, and explores how our deepest desires for happiness are satisfied in one person, Jesus Christ.

Life Explored has been designed to speak powerfully to those who don't consider themselves to be religious and have never read the Bible. However, it will also provoke good discussions among followers of Christ too.

Please visit <https://stmarksdp.org/event/life-explored/> or contact our Outreach Minister, Erica Oliver, to ask any questions via erica.oliver@stmarksdp.org

**LAUNCH OF THE ST MARK'S
HISTORICAL SOCIETY**

The St Mark's Historical Society (SMHS) has recently formed to preserve and celebrate the achievements of our church as a source of inspiration and encouragement to the development of modern Australian society. The SMHS is curated by Ian Tresise, Honorary Historian, supported by other enthusiastic volunteers.

Ian explained: "Since its foundation as a Chapel of Ease in October 1847, St Mark's has always held a key role as a sacred place of worship and a source of philanthropy and benevolence as Sydney and the nation have developed. Men of noble intent and their



families have humbly gathered here to give thanks to God and to provide leadership to the community, serving through the grace of Jesus Christ and seeking to show God's love in action."

If you would like to volunteer to help SMHS establish our collection and plan future events, share personal records and photos, or learn more about the interesting history of St Mark's please visit <https://stmarksdp.org/ministry/historicalsociety/> or contact Ian via history@smdp.org.au



ENRICHMENT ONLINE

Come and gain valuable practical advice for enriching your relationship, all from the comfort of your own home. The Marriage Course will be held on Monday nights via Zoom starting 19 October 2020 and involves a series of seven sessions, designed to help couples invest in their relationship and build a strong marriage.

For more information, please visit <https://stmarksdp.org/ministries/marriage-enrichment/> or contact erica.oliver@stmarksdp.org

SCRIPTURE MEMORISATION COURSE

Nine enthusiastic parishioners embraced the six-week scripture memory course run by John and Megan Best in May/June via Zoom. The content, sourced from The Navigators, involved studying and memorising 12 Bible verses which are foundations for the Christian life. The course is based on the "The Wheel" diagram, which visually explains the structure of a God-glorifying life and each week the group studied scriptures relevant to a particular dimension of the wheel.

The course proved very helpful. Janet Mitchell had attended similar courses previously but shared: "I was reminded of the extent and depth of God's love for us and that Christ lives in us." The course strengthened her spiritual life, with Janet reflecting: "My interactions with the risen Christ and his Spirit have become deeper and more fulfilling."

As a new Christian, Robert Connell would



recommend the course to anyone. "I am far from being knowledgeable about the Bible. The course enabled me to understand some key elements of Christian life,"

Robert reflected. He

feels the course has changed his interactions with the Bible: "It has provided me with a lot more context when I am reading the Bible. I now tend to reflect on the passages that we studied and their applicability to other passages that I am reading. I also think the wheel dimensions underpin and influence much more of what I think."

JOIN WITH US TODAY

St Mark's relies on the generosity of our community to fund the ministries within our parish and beyond. We would be grateful if you could consider just giving whatever you can contribute on a regular basis to help secure our ministries.

Please consider making a gift to St Mark's. Donations can either be directed towards non-tax-deductible projects or tax-deductible projects. Could you please help with all or part of these items for 2020?

NON-TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION PROJECTS

Suggestions include:

- A new projector screen - \$8,000
- Upgrade to livestream equipment - \$8,000
- Children's and Youth ministry - \$1,000
- Scripture Teaching (SRE) - \$2,000
- COVIDsafe cleaning products - \$1,000
- Teaching Resources for Children - \$200
- Bibles for newcomers -\$30 each

TAX-DEDUCTIBLE DONATION PROJECTS

You may like to make a tax-deductible donation to St Mark's National Trust. Previously, tax-deductible offerings have enabled us to purchase new carpet and revitalise our sound system. Suggestions include:

- The Organ Fund (maintenance and tuning)
- Maintenance of stonework (we are currently commissioning stone masons)

HOW TO DONATE

To make a donation to St Mark's please visit

<https://stmarksdp.org/giving/>