



# THE AUSTRALIAN EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

March/June 2022

## FORGIVEN!

We are familiar with the words from the Small Catechism *"In this Christian Church He daily and richly forgives all my sins and the sins of all believers."* In the Large Catechism, Luther writes, *"We believe that in this Christian community we have forgiveness of sins, which takes place through the holy sacraments and absolution as well as through all the comforting words of the entire gospel"* (LC II, 54). Yet the church, created and called together by the gospel that gives and bestows forgiveness of sins, is a messy place. Forgiveness is messy, for it has as its target real flesh-and-blood sinners.

Writing to the Corinthians, Paul had shown himself as a servant of the binding key: *"Whosoever sins you retain, they are retained."* A man in the congregation was guilty of a sin that even the pagans found appalling and abhorrent, incest. He had sexual relations with his father's wife. Even though Paul is physically absent from Corinth, he is present with them in spirit and by the power of the Lord Christ, the assembled congregation is to hand the man over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh (1 Corinthians 5). That is to say that this man who was secure in his own sin, fortified in the flesh, which lives in rebellion against the Spirit, might be broken and brought to repentance and restored to faith and saved on the day of the Lord Jesus Christ. Everything in the church is set in place that we might have the forgiveness of sins purchased and won for us by the blood of the Lamb of God. When the binding key is used, it is never to simply rid the congregation of a pesky sinner, but that the impenitent might learn to abhor his or her sin and trust in the absolution: *"Your sins are forgiven."*

One of the fathers of the church once said, *"The church that cannot curse can no longer bless either."* So Paul says that this man is turned over to the devil for the destruction of the flesh that in the end he might be saved. God's love is not a sloppy love that leaves the sinner with the very sin that is condemning him or her. Some in our day would confuse God's absolution with affirmation. No wonder that the cynic Voltaire<sup>1</sup> once mocked: *"The world is nicely arranged. God loves to forgive, and I love to sin."* Affirmation leaves a sinner in his or her sins, and he who is left alone with his sins is left *utterly alone*. In confession and absolution, the merciful Lord does not leave us with our sins, but He rescues us from them. He frees us from that enslavement for sake of His redeeming death that we might be His, live under Him in His Kingdom, and serve Him

in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, even as He is risen from the dead to reign forever.

The messiness of forgiveness is also there when Paul again instructs the congregation, not in person, but by means of a letter to put into practice the loosing key, which declares, *"Whosoever sins you forgive, they are forgiven them"* (2 Corinthians 2:3-11). We do not know the details of the case that Paul refers to in 2 Corinthians, but we do know that this situation had caused him *"much affliction and anguish of heart."* He had shed many a tear over those who would not recognise that the words he proclaimed were indeed the very Word of the Lord.

Now the offender has repented and has received the forgiveness of sins. There is now no room for vengeance. No place for holding on to the past as though there was still a debt to be paid. No questioning of motives. No grudges are preserved.

There is no waiting to see if the offending member shows signs that his life is renewed and renovated. No space is left for the self-righteousness that would sing, *"Chief of sinners though I be, there is always someone worse than me."* Now there is only Paul's plea that the congregation embrace this brother in the love of Christ.

That is the way the Lord's forgiveness works. It is always on the move from Christ to us and out to others. Any blockage of this flow gives Satan an opportunity to accuse, attack, and destroy, as in his cunning he would outwit us. The old evil foe would deceive us to believe the lie that we have no need for Christ because we have no sins to confess or that somehow our sins are too big for Calvary. If he fails there, he would seek to convince us that we really do not need to forgive those who sin against us. Such, Paul says, are Satan's designs. One way or another, Satan would keep us from receiving the forgiveness of our sins.

We have a Lord who has defeated Satan. This Lord who was put to death for our trespasses and raised from the dead for our justification lives as your brother and Saviour. One teacher of the church said that the absolution is the verdict of the Last Day slipping out ahead of time. Even in the midst of the messiness of life in the church, that is a promise to trust, for it is the Word of the Lord whose nail-scarred hands hold the keys of heaven and hell. His absolution is absolute and it is for us.

## TROUBLE IN THE ANGLICAN CHURCH

In Early May, the General Synod of the Australian Anglican Church debated what its stance was to be on human sexuality. A vote to affirm the church's traditional position on marriage was strongly supported by clergy and laity but was narrowly rejected by the bishops. The following was an article posted in the *Australian Newspaper*:

<sup>1</sup> A French Enlightenment writer, historian, and philosopher born in 1694, who was famous for his wit and criticism of Christianity.

## Gay marriage vote divides Anglican Church

*Jamie Walker Associate Editor*

The Anglican Church is teetering on the brink of a conservative walkout after church leaders narrowly voted down a bid to define marriage as being exclusively between a man and woman.

In a boilover at the first Anglian General Synod to convene since gay marriage became law in 2017, a 24-strong panel of metropolitan archbishops and senior diocesan bishops held out against the majority of clerical and lay delegates to sink the controversial motion.

Even then, the two members of the so-called House of Bishops who abstained could have turned the vote that went down to the wire there, failing 12-10, after it sailed through the houses of clergy and laity on Wednesday.

In aggregate, the statement sponsored by the conservative Archbishop of Sydney, Kanishka Raffel, affirming orthodox church doctrine that marriage was of a man and woman and condemning ceremonies to bless gay nuptials, passed 133-86 before the bishops exercised their casting vote.

A bitterly disappointed Archbishop Raffel warned the church in Australia was at the “tipping point” that caused its counterparts in the US, Britain, Canada, Brazil and New Zealand to splinter over same-sex marriage.

Describing the situation as “perilous” for the church, he told *The Australian*: “What we have seen over the last 20 years or so in mostly Western churches is where people have lost confidence in the goodness and trustworthiness of God’s word as it has been expressed in Anglican liturgy and practice for 500 years ... those churches have fractured. We don’t want that. But we know what has happened in many countries and I guess it is perilous in that sense.”

The chair of the Australian arm of the Global Anglican Future Conference, Bishop of Tasmania Richard Condie, said a shadow church had been set up as a “lifeboat” for those who left. Entire congregations and their priests could shift across to Gafcon’s<sup>2</sup> nascent Diocese of the Southern Cross.

“I am not a prophet to say what I think will happen next, except to say what has happened everywhere else this bridge has been crossed,” Bishop Condie said.

“People who hold a deep conviction about this matter have left their Anglican Church ... because it is of such seriousness.

“I expect there will be people in the Anglican Church of Australia today who will feel that pressure.”

The Anglicans’ day of reckoning on same-sex marriage has been coming since Australians voted for it in a national plebiscite nearly five years ago and was put off twice when the usually triennial General Synod had to be cancelled in 2020 and last year because of Covid-19. Church conservatives backed by the wealth and numbers of the powerful Sydney Diocese fought tooth and nail to have the parliament-like assembly reinforce the orthodox position that only heterosexual couples could be wed by a priest.

But progressives argued that denying a blessing to gay couples who wanted their civil vows recognised was cruel and un-Christian and would leave the church out of step with mainstream culture and inclusive social values.

The infighting is set to continue, as conservatives reacted with anger and shock to the defeat.

Some predicted the dioceses of the 12 archbishops and ranking bishops who voted against the same-sex statement would be the first to be hit by defections.

In a personal statement to the General Synod, Archbishop Raffel said the national church’s federated structure and processes were at risk. “We may very well become a church where every clergyman relates to his bishop in the 23 dioceses,” he told delegates.

“And in that case we ought to stop wasting each other’s time by gathering in this way.”

Speaking against the statement ahead of Wednesday’s vote, vicar Shane Hubner of St Peters Anglican Church, Box Hill, in Melbourne’s east, said the notion that marriage was the union of a man and woman was “deeply painful” for him to accept when he had two gay siblings.

He could not reconcile his experience with them and a statement seeking to deny God’s blessing. “It is deeply painful ... to have discussions where I have to state that the church I serve does not recognise the blessing of God in their relationships,” he said.

### ***AELC Statement on same-sex marriage:***

God has instituted marriage as a life-long union of one man and one woman....

We reject the use of the word ‘marriage’ when dealing with the coming together of a same-sex couple. The proper definition of the term ‘marriage’ derives from Old French, *marier* (to marry), and ultimately Latin, *maritare*, which means ‘to provide with a husband or wife.’ The original meaning of marriage never meant to describe the ‘coming together’ of two people of the same sex.

We reject the idea that in the eyes of the state, since two same-sex people can also love and complement each other, that nothing should stop them from coming together as one. Such thinking is an act that is clearly contrary to the

<sup>2</sup> The Gafcon movement is a global family of authentic Anglicans standing together to retain and restore the Bible to the heart of the Anglican Communion. More info can be found at [www.gafcon.org](http://www.gafcon.org)

Creator's original design for love and companionship in marriage and is an abomination.

We therefore reject any notion of a same-sex couple's union as being no different to marriage between man and woman.

### DOUBT FROM INGRATITUDE

One of the challenges that Christians may experience in their faith life is to be plagued by doubt. Doubts can arise when faith is either malformed or malnourished.

We must also understand right from the beginning that doubt is not a more casual way of describing unbelief. Doubt is not unbelief. The word 'doubt' comes from the Latin word, *dubitare*. It means to be double-minded, or to be in two minds about something. Belief and unbelief are single-minded perspectives; yes and no. We can think of doubt as equivalent to a simultaneous *yes and no*. There is an uncomfortable tension about doubt. The more important the issues involved, the greater the tension. It is like standing with one foot in one rowboat and one foot in another. Doubt over things that matter presses us to resolve the tension into either belief or unbelief.

While we must recognise that doubt can assault our faith, yet doubt should be viewed as a symptom: something is wrong with faith. Different problems that faith can experience are manifested by different kinds of doubt. Doubt must be seen by the Christian as both threat and opportunity. If ignored and neglected, doubt has the potential to destroy faith, yet if understood and tended to properly by God's Word, faith can be matured and strengthen dramatically.

Perhaps the most insidious and destructive variety of doubt, because it is rarely seen as a form of doubt, springs from a slow growing ambivalence about the value of our inheritance in Christ. Its most recognisable manifestation is an attitude of ungratefulness. Here the Christian walk of faith is not encountering too much tension with the experiences of fallen existence. Rather, there is too little, or perhaps, none at all.

This subversive kind of doubt is well exemplified by the two sons in the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11-32). Both sons had lived their whole lives in the father's house, enjoying the fullness of its blessings. Progressively, the Prodigal Son becomes discontent with a growing conviction that life would be better lived, out in the exciting world. Believing to have cashed in his inheritance, he leaves for the glitter of the world, but there receives a new vision. He comes to the startling realisation that slavery in his father's house would be preferable to the despair of his present existence, starving in the company of pigs. Returning home with his new vision, he is surprised at the welcome and

overwhelmed with gratitude to live again as a son in his father's house. Interestingly, we can also see in the complaint of his brother the same ungrateful attitude, but not quite in as advanced a stage.

Christians who have grown up in the household of faith and have lived in strong Christian homes are prone to this kind of doubt. It is so easy to take all the saving gifts of Christ for granted. Many silently suffer an impoverished faith, lacking a vision of the magnitude and stark contrast between sin and grace. It is not that grace has been in short supply. Indeed, as in the parable, all the comforts of the Gospel have been present since before one can remember. But our vision of the abundance and scope of grace is, however, closely linked to our vision of the pervasiveness and depths of sin. What is in short supply is a full-orbed awareness of the depths of one's sin and the extent of depravity in the old world. In the absence of full-strength Law and sheltered living, the vision of our fallenness can become vague and shallow. Thus the immensity of grace is missed, and its value discounted. Seeing little in what has always been there, faith is in danger of being cashed in for whatever fallen commitment may seem to offer more.

In such a state, one is not overwhelmed by a despair over personal sinfulness. Rather little holy anguish is experienced at all. This is *doubt from ingratitude*. It is the failure to appreciate the tension between being simultaneously a sinner and a saint. Absent is any sense of *but by the grace of God go I*. Moreover, the incredible joy from hearing *once you were no people but now you have become God's people* (1 Peter 2:10) is missing. The first symptom of doubt from an ungrateful spirit is boredom. More advanced symptoms include indifference and then, perhaps, outright irritation toward the blessings of the Gospel and the means by which they come to us.

What is so destructive about this form of doubt is that Christians who suffer from it are rarely aware of its presence or even that it is a form of doubt. There is no experience of crisis to sound the alarm, just calm complacency. Perhaps many whom we count as dying or dead wood in our congregations are silent sufferers of doubt from ingratitude. Maybe we can even perceive shades of an ungrateful spirit in ourselves as well.

What is needed, of course, is to be taken behind God's spiritual woodshed and given a good thrashing. The hammer of fallen existence and the piercing blade of the Law need to come crashing down on our self-confidence and complacency, exposing our ingratitude for what it is. Shaken by the magnitude of our helpless sinful condition and in holy anguish, we need to be chased into the waiting out-stretched arms of a gracious Father. He will again for the first time, wrap us in the precious robe of righteousness bought and paid for by His only Son. Now with a healthy

tension between sin and grace restored, we hear God's call anew, and gratefully take up life again in the cross of Christ.

### ELECTION CERTAINTY

Regardless of how you feel about our newly elected government leaders after our recent federal election, the eternal truth of God's Word does not change!

Daniel 2:21: "(God) removes kings and raises up kings."

Romans 13:1: "The authorities that exist are appointed by God."

Daniel 4:17: "The Most High rules in the kingdom of men, Gives it to whomever He will."

2 Samuel 23:3: "He who rules over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God."

Psalms 46:10: "Be still (relax), I am God; I shall be exalted among the nations, I shall be exalted in the earth." These words are God's rebuke to those who engage in sinful activity to gain power or achieve their goals but words of comfort and peace to those who trust and know that God is always in control!

Ephesians 1:22: "(God) has put all things under His (Christ's) feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church." Jesus, the Risen and Living Head of the Christian Church, will make everything happen to serve His loving purpose for the benefit of the Christian Church, that is, all believers in Jesus Christ.

Romans 8:28: "We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose." Leader's change! God's Word does not change! Relax! God is still in control!

### DOG DOOR DISCOVERED ON MARS

As the rover Curiosity explores our red neighbour Mars, many scientists and space buffs wait with bated breath for news that the planet held (or maybe even holds) life. And the newest find that briefly set the internet ablaze with discussion was a photo NASA released of a "door" in a cliff face on Mars.

The yawning black opening, according to NASA, is a "doorway into the ancient past." But, rather than being a portal into an alien dwelling, NASA claims the "door" - a diminutive 12 by 16 inch opening - is just a natural "open fracture" in the bedrock. Due to the small size, the NASA team nicknamed the fracture a "dog door."

It's interesting that at even the slightest sign of the possibility that there may be evidence for some kind of alien life, the internet frenzies - even when that "evidence" turns out to be the brain trying to explain "ambiguous shapes" in terms of known objects (something called pareidolia). And yet the evidence for a Creator God is, to put it mildly, far more obvious than a tiny sloping "doorway" in a cliff on an uninhabited planet. The structure

of the universe, the incredible orderliness of the cosmos, the language system that is DNA, the complexity of life, the beauty of nature - all of it cries out that there is a God who made everything. Yet this overwhelming evidence is ignored by so many of the same people who will excitedly pore over NASA photos, searching for evidence of extra-terrestrials.

This is a great reminder that everyone has put their faith in something. There are those who have placed their faith in Christ and in His eternal Word (and this is not a blind faith - there is overwhelming evidence for a Creator and the truth of His Word), and there are those who blindly put their faith in evolution and the possibility that life evolved somewhere else (something for which there is not a shred of credible evidence). The question is not, "Do you have faith?" The question is, "Where have you placed your faith?"

### FROM THE PASTOR

As we moved through the Seasons of Lent and Easter, we once again were shown the grace and love that Christ has for us.

Our services were a little disrupted due to illness, but we managed to get through! Due to baptisms and confirmation services, we have had to change a few services, but this is a good thing. It shows that God is still calling children into His kingdom, and that our younger members are re-affirming their faith and commitment to God. Since our service times can change on short notice, it is always important to check your bulletins for any changes. The yearly schedule sent out at the beginning of the year is helpful, but not always accurate. If you miss a few Sundays and are not sure of service times, ask someone, or check out the website where the latest service times are always published.

I am taking holidays from the 27<sup>th</sup> of June to the 11<sup>th</sup> of July. During this time, I may not be able to be reached, so if any emergency arises, please contact an elder.

Our next confirmation class will begin later in July, and so, for any parents with confirmation aged children, please speak to me so we can work out classes.

As we now enter the time of the Church, the season after Pentecost, we take this time to focus on growing together in the life of the Holy Trinity. The church is decorated in Green, the colour of growing plants. This marks the season of growth living in our Baptism and receiving the Lord's Word and Sacraments. Hoping to see you all in Church!  
Pastor

### LATEST AELC WEBSITE STATISTICS

The following are the latest figures from the AELC website: The number of average daily visitors for the February-May period was 10744, up from 9590 in the last reporting period. There was a large spike of visitors in May. The most visits take place on Sundays and Tuesdays.