**March 7**

**A craftsman’s present**

By Bill Pugh

It is a privilege to be a school chaplain. A kind of fluid ministry to succeeding students, staff and parents. If you can teach another subject that is a bonus. Involvement in sport, activities and camps, help to get closer and away from the ‘holy image’. Staff appreciate it too.

Over the years you get to know individual students pretty well. Peter was good with his hands, shaping pieces of wood. He was rather surprised to know that, Jesus, the Son of God, could use his hands as a carpenter, getting them dirty.

We talked about Jesus’ hands, healing, blessing and praying hands. He took children into his arms. Soon there were painful nails in his hands.

At the end of Term 3 Peter gave me a present, some kind of object, carefully wrapped in Christmas paper. A smiling thankyou from me, and a promise to leave it under the tree, until Christmas morning. It was my turn to open my gifts. I came to Peter’s and unwrapped it, carefully. Inside was a simple wooden cross, beautifully carved, the work of a craftsman. I thought about that for some time, still do.

Reflection

How better to express the Gospel. Gift and Grace all carefully wrapped in the one package, heaven sent. Theologians try to explain it and we to comprehend. Peter used his hands to illustrate what words find so difficult. Not always easy to live up to the role of chaplain. You can’t add up the results, nor should you. But sometimes it has a surprising reward, which makes it all worthwhile.

**March 14**

**The new normal**

By Ian Menzies

In mathematics, a tangent is a straight line that touches a curve at a single point, and has the same gradient as the curve there. A common saying is that one ‘can go off on a tangent’ from whatever pathway one might be on, and for many of us life since COVID may feel like we have done just that.

The way we live and interact has radically changed. But a mathematical tangent is a straight line, and our road ahead might seem anything but straight at the moment. For a lot of us, that’s not what ‘the new normal’ feels like at all. But then consider that, mathematically, a normal is a line at right angles to the tangent.

Perhaps that is indeed a bit more like our experience: we haven’t smoothly continued on to a straight path at much the same angle at all, we have experienced a sudden, sharp turn and are heading off in a completely new direction, with each day at times seemingly further away from our old pathway than before. Unexpected, certainly.

But life is always a journey; God is still with us. We need to be open to these new circumstances, new challenges, and while remembering and celebrating the old, still look to embracing the adventures ahead as we head off on our new normal.

 Reflection

Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons; he removes kings and sets up kings; he gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to those who have understanding. (Daniel 2:20b-21)

**March 21**

**Let the organ thunder**

By Bill Pugh

Psalm 150, a Psalm of Praise, urges the congregation to praise God with music and dancing. A variety of instruments make up the Temple orchestra and the praise must be loud. With respect, I would like to add the organ. Some would include others.

Organists are hard to find and encourage today. True, all kinds of musical instruments can contribute to worship. We should not forget the organ which sets the tone of a service, from joyous praise and thanksgiving to solemn meditation. Wonderful spiritual therapy.

It allows us to celebrate, express our grief, and unites us as one in worship. Great composers have written wonderful works for the organ. Very talented organists play them. Sunday by Sunday our church organists assist our praise.

I want to mention just one, representative of many. In a country preaching place he began playing the organ when he was 10, had four years leave of absence during the war, and finished when he died in his 80s.

Sunday by Sunday, he played the old pedal organ. The vase of fresh flowers on top rocked when he pedalled loud praise.

Praise God for all who provide music for worship. For all serve the One: “Alpha and Omega he! Let the organ thunder, while the choir with peals of glee doth rend the air asunder.” (Anon., 15th century, Percy Dearmer 1867–1936).

Reflection

Lord, thank you for the dedication of all musicians and choristers who give so much to our songs of praise. Amen

**March 28**

**The eye of the beholder**

By Ian Menzies

Around the turn of the last century my pioneering grandparents set out to establish a new life for themselves at Lorne in the Otway Ranges. Travelling by horse-drawn coach that wound down a rough track through thick forest, my grandmother reportedly sat up with the driver, nursing for protection a pair of bohemian crystal vases that had been a wedding gift from my grandfather, occasionally alighting to walk whenever the track was too steep, either up or down.

I often picture that scene in my imagination when regularly driving (in what would be then-unthinkable comfort) down the same route.

My mother treasured her inherited vase, and now it is mine. Mentioning this vignette one day in an aside to my cousin, he announced that he, too, had inherited “an impractical glass jug” that his mother always insisted was “an heirloom” and that was “stuck in a cupboard somewhere.” It was the second of the pair.

Now aware of its provenance, he rapidly reassessed his opinion and resolved to ensure his children were aware of its history. Beauty is indeed in the eye of the beholder. Fortunately, each of us has been assured that we are all precious in the eyes of God; loved unconditionally for what we are, our life stories held, unforgotten, eternally.

 Reflection

For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8: 38-39)