

ADVENT REFLECTIONS 2024

BEING SALT AND LIGHT

**4 Reflections on St Paul's
Letter to the Philippians**

DIOCESE OF BUNBURY



CONTRIBUTERS

Tribute: Bishop Ian Coutts enjoys working on his model railway, when he has some spare time. He has been working on it for over 5 years and it is still not finished! He also enjoys flying and has held a pilot's licence for over 30 years, which helps with some of the journeys across the diocese.

Week 1: Rev'd Justine Richmond became interested in chaplaincy while teaching Italian at Georgiana Molloy Anglican School, where she was involved with chaplaincy for over 10 years. She was awarded a Graduate Diploma in Chaplaincy from Murdoch University in 2017 and is passionate about the important role of the chaplain. Rev'd Justine is now the Priest in Charge of the Dunsborough Parish, where she believes her 'inner chaplain' is a real asset to her ministry. In her free time, she enjoys growing vegetables and likes to spend time cooking and preserving the harvest to share with others, not wanting to waste what God provides in abundance. Rev'd Justine also likes to travel and loves learning new languages.

Week 2: Karen White divides her week between Perth and the family farm at Wickepin. Whilst in Perth Karen works at Perth Children's Hospital as a Pastoral Carer, offering spiritual and emotional support to patients, families and staff. With a background in nursing, Karen feels at home in the hospital environment and is continually humbled by people's honesty, vulnerability and resilience. Country life provides balance: time for reflection, connection with nature, and the gift of God's loving presence in the rhythm of life.

Week 3 - Rev'd Canon James Tabor is the Chaplain of Frederick Irwin Anglican School. He was formerly the Rector of Pinjarra-Waroona in the Diocese of Bunbury. James returned to Australia in 2017 after an absence of 35 years, during which he served in the Royal Navy as a Chaplain, as well as a myriad of other roles and tasks too numerous to mention. He is married with three adult children, and lives near Mandurah, Western Australia. James has a Bachelor of Arts degree in English, and in History, a Bachelor of Theology degree, and is a Master of Laws.

Week 4 - Rev'd Esther Leach is chaplain for palliative care in the Great Southern. She offers spiritual/pastoral care to patients, families and staff of 'all faiths and none', visiting across towns, farms, homes, hospitals, nursing homes and the hospice. Esther's growing awareness of God's invitations and nearness to us humans (who readily look away), helps her in being-with people in the darkest valleys. Esther is also developing her role as a spiritual director through a two-year internship program. Other current and previous roles include many family relationships, social worker, friend and parish priest. These continually inform Esther's fascination about how Jesus is present with people 'in real life'.

INTRODUCTION

Welcome to our third set of Advent Reflections inspired by the Diocesan Vision and Strategy. Our theme is 'Being Salt and Light in our Communities'. The readings are taken from St Paul's Letter to the Philippians, which features in the lectionary readings for Advent.

Each year we have enjoyed reflections by lay and clergy from different parts of the diocese. This year we asked some of our chaplains to write the reflections for us. Chaplains have much experience of being salt and light in their communities, as you can see in the biographies of the contributors and in Bishop Ian's tribute to Rev'd John Jones. I would like to sincerely thank Bishop Ian, Rev'd Esther Leach, Rev'd Justine Richmond, Rev'd Cannon James Tabor and Karen White for their contributions, each a uniquely crafted reflection, put together with love for our encouragement.

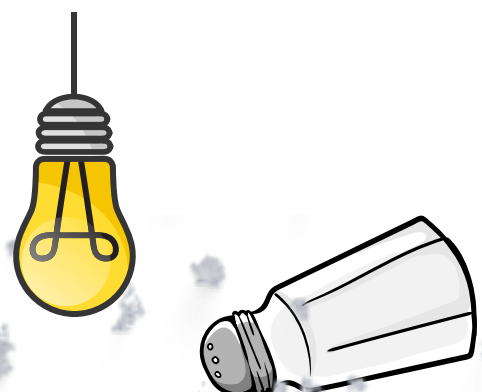
The focus of each reflection can be summarised in one word or short phrase: Abundance, Constancy, Standing Fast and Joy. There is much to ponder about how we can be salt and light in our world through each of these qualities.

Reflections are a different way of approaching a Bible passage than a more typical Bible study. Reflections are less about 'head knowledge' and more about a heart to heart connection with God's word. They are about listening for the whisper of the Holy Spirit as he draws your attention to a word, phrase or idea in the scripture, the written reflection or the accompanying image. If this approach to scripture is new to you, some tips have been included on the next page to help you get started, including a suggestion for how a small group might use the reflections.

Rev'd Justine Richmond from Dunsborough parish comments, "I think the contemplative approach during Advent is an absolute winner, because everyone is so busy in the lead up to Christmas. I am hoping that the reflections can again be a little oasis of 'being' with God in the midst of much 'doing'."

As always, we welcome your feedback and hope these reflections will be a blessing to you as you contemplate how you, like St Paul, can be salt and light in your community, whatever your circumstances.

Verity Murray
Assistant to the Vision and Strategy



GETTING STARTED

How to Use the Reflections

1. Create a sacred space: Find a quiet place where you can be alone with God.
2. Pray for guidance: Begin by praying and inviting God's presence into your reflection time.
3. Read the scripture: Read the scripture passage and reflection slowly and attentively.
4. Meditate and listen: Take some time to meditate on the scripture, reflection and image provided and listen for God's voice. Which words 'jumps off' the page, interest or intrigue you? What catches your attention in the image? What emotions, if any, are being invoked in you? What connections do you see with the scripture and meditations? You might not resonate with all three elements of the reflection, in which case, stay with the one thing that is speaking to you and try to go deeper with that.
5. Journal your thoughts: Write down any insights, impressions, or messages you receive during your reflection time.
6. Pray for application: Close your reflection with a prayer, asking God to show you how to apply what you have learned to your life.

Using the Reflections in a small group setting

This simple format is a suggestion for small groups who wish to use the reflections together. The times shown can be adjusted to suit the needs of each group.

- Gather together to share and open with prayer, (10 minutes)
- Taking a cuppa into the church grounds or a quiet spot in the church building for silent reflection, following the steps outlined above (30-35 minutes),
- Regrouping for sharing time and closing prayer. (15- 20 minutes)



Photo by Rev Justine Richmond

TRIBUTE

Rev'd John Jones

by Bishop Ian Coutts

When we were considering who might be an example of 'salt and light' for these Advent Reflections, Revd John Jones came to mind.

As you may know, John died in April this year after only being diagnosed with cancer a matter of weeks before.

Revd John was a South African champion surfer who had represented his country of origin. He was also a Principal Horticulturalist responsible for the Presidential gardens in Cape Town. As such he met and knew Nelson Mandela. John typically never put himself forward or made anything of these experiences. He was the opposite of the proverbial 'tall poppy'.

In his ministry as an itinerant priest in a number of outlying parishes, as a Mission to Seafarers' chaplain and as Chaplain to Albany Maximum Security prison, John was known as a gentle and humble servant who just loved people, even the hard to love ones.



You do not need a lot of salt or light to make a significant difference. John exemplified this to the extent that as one chaplain, the Acting Superintendent wrote to say, John had changed the atmosphere of the entire prison.

Despite being a civilian, the officers formed an enormous guard of honour at John's funeral service. It was evident how many officer and prisoners' lives he had touched.

Jesus calls his followers similarly to be salt and light in the communities to which we belong.



Photos supplied by Bishop Ian Coutts

WEEK 1 OF ADVENT

Beginning Sunday 1st December

by Rev'd Justine Richmond

PHILIPPIANS 1:1-11

*1 Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:
2 Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Paul's Prayer for the Philippians

3 I thank my God every time I remember you, 4 constantly praying with joy in every one of my prayers for all of you, 5 because of your sharing in the gospel from the first day until now. 6 I am confident of this, that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. 7 It is right for me to think this way about all of you, because you hold me in your heart, for all of you share in God's grace with me, both in my imprisonment and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel. 8 For God is my witness, how I long for all of you with the compassion of Christ Jesus. 9 And this is my prayer, that your love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight 10 to help you to determine what is best, so that on the day of Christ you may be pure and blameless, 11 having produced the harvest of righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ for the glory and praise of God.

REFLECTION: ABUNDANCE

A few years ago, I visited the Mamertine prison in Rome, where legend holds that St Peter and St Paul were imprisoned. It was a dark, gloomy place, with a hole in the roof where prisoners were thrown into the pit – a five-metre drop. Many did not survive the fall.

It is said that they baptised and converted over 30 people in that dungeon, including two prison guards. As I stood there, I thought about the faith that it would take to be in this terrible place, sharing the gospel despite their apparently hopeless situation. I imagined Paul writing this letter in a place like this.



Paul has clearly experienced God's grace and he prays that "love may overflow more and more with knowledge and full insight". (v.9). We could have forgiven Paul if he had focused on his scarcity - his lack of freedom and the threat of being killed. Yet, the letter is filled with joy and hope, and you cannot help but notice the effect of God's grace on Paul, despite his dire situation. God's grace is an abundant gift to be treasured.

In our Parish, we have a prayer quilt ministry. In the photo, there is certainly an abundance of quilts. There is so much more - an abundance of talented quilters, an abundance of laughter and fellowship, an abundance of love, an abundance of donated fabric, an abundance of prayers and an abundance of monetary donations.

Where do you see God's abundance in your life? What abundant gifts has God given you which can be shared with others? This week we begin the Advent journey towards another precious gift - of Emmanuel, God with us. If we are to be salt and light to our communities, could we start by being alert to the signs of God's abundance in our lives?



Both Photos by Rev Justine Richmond

WEEK 2 OF ADVENT

Beginning Sunday 8th December

PHILIPPIANS 1:12-18

Paul's Present Circumstances

12 I want you to know, beloved, that what has happened to me has actually helped to spread the gospel, 13 so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to everyone else that my imprisonment is for Christ; 14 and most of the brothers and sisters, having been made confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, dare to speak the word with greater boldness and without fear.

15 Some proclaim Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from goodwill. 16 These proclaim Christ out of love, knowing that I have been put here for the defence of the gospel; 17 the others proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but intending to increase my suffering in my imprisonment. 18 What does it matter? Just this, that Christ is proclaimed in every way, whether out of false motives or true; and in that I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice . . .

REFLECTION: CONSTANCY

Our circumstance impacts our perspective. Paul wrote to the Philippians whilst in prison. From this place of enforced confinement, he shared his refreshed perspective: Christ's love was at work in all the chaos and upheaval. Paul focused on the constant love of Christ that was present no matter what his circumstance. For us too, as we live our daily lives with change in and around us, Christ remains the same. Through joy and challenge, Christ's love is ever present.

How do you notice and receive this unchanging love? How do you share it?



Photo by Karen White

WEEK 3 OF ADVENT

Beginning Sunday 15th December

PHILIPPIANS 2:12-16

Shining as Lights in the World

12 Therefore, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed me, not only in my presence, but much more now in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; 13 for it is God who is at work in you, enabling you both to will and to work for his good pleasure.

14 Do all things without murmuring and arguing, 15 so that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God without blemish in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, in which you shine like stars in the world. 16 It is by your holding fast to the word of life that I can boast on the day of Christ that I did not run in vain or labour in vain.

REFLECTION: HOLDING FAST

Paul must have been sad to leave Philippi. The authorities had thrown him in prison with Silas. When he finally got out, it must have been a relief, tinged with bitterness to escape to Ephesus.

Paul was still in touch with Lydia in the city, and presumably had high hopes for his mission there, and the young Church. Despite the opposition of the city magistrates, Paul must have prayed that his followers of "the Way" would shine like beacons of faith in a city apparently beset by corruption.

For Paul, holding fast to faith in Christ was a witness to truth in a challenging and corrupting world. Would his young Church weather the storms, or was his labour in vain? Would the word of life overcome the darkness, or would his escape from the city be used against Lydia and her Church?

Do we some times feel like a lone voice, or do we by our words and action bring light to the world, and shine like stars in the blackness? We remember always that God is at work in us, and through us, and God enables us.



Photo supplied by Rev James Tabor

WEEK 4 OF ADVENT

Beginning Sunday 22nd December

PHILIPPIANS 4:4-9

Exhortations

4 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. 5 Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. 6 Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. 7 And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

8 Finally, beloved, whatever is true, whatever is honourable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. 9 Keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you.

REFLECTION: JOY

Today I discussed verse four with a dying person. Talk of 'rejoicing' in this context seems untimely, but Paul challenges this and says "always". And in recognising this is hard, or might surprise or confound, he repeats himself: 'again I will say, Rejoice'. What a remarkable thing to write. And from a first century prison cell!

But re-read verses 4-7, and underline 'God' and 'the Lord'. The key is Paul's focus: the Lord, not us, nor our circumstances. 'Rejoice in the Lord' we're told... Celebrate him, what he's done, the work he will complete, and even where he is: 'Near'.

Paul recognises this is tough and encourages us with guards and reinforcements. Guards for our hearts and minds (verse 7), and reinforcing protections through what we think about (v8) and what we do (v9). All this contrasts with the world we inhabit. To be light or salt, and to find 'the peace of God' (v7), we must focus on 'the God of peace' (v9).

In the scene shown in this photo, God's beauty, expansiveness and invitation take my breath away. Captivated by this expression of His character, there's no desire to look away to the unjust, ignoble or untrue. It's different from our everyday lives, but the Lord is still near.

What God places before us on the table and invites us to rejoice in, is waiting for us, here and now. Yes, we wait for him to come. But the one who humbled himself and wants us to truly know Him? He is waiting for us



Photo by Anna Leach. Scargill Christian Community, Kettlewell, Yorkshire, UK.