

# Beyond 2020 Vision

A Publication of Morialta Uniting Church

December 2025

Morialta Uniting Church—follow us on Facebook or check out our website at [www.morialtauca.org.au](http://www.morialtauca.org.au)

Welcome to the December edition of Beyond 2020 Vision. As we move into Advent and prepare for Christmas we recall the words from 'The Messiah' – *For unto to us a child is born ... And he will be called ... Prince of Peace.* Andrew Hamilton reflects on how we might achieve peace.

There is also lots more from the Morialta Community and several stories on the many traditions surrounding Christmas.

**The deadline for the FIRST Vision for 2026 will be 29<sup>th</sup> January.** Either drop contributions in to the church office, or call Colin on 0427 122 106 or email [snout-n-about@bigpond.com](mailto:snout-n-about@bigpond.com)

*May your Christmas be filled with peace, love and joy!*

Colin Cargill, editor and Helena Begg, publisher

## A reflection on Peace

Adapted from an article by Andrew Hamilton SJ,  
published in Eureka Street



*For unto to us a child is born ...  
And he will be called ... Prince  
of Peace.*

Peace has a magic to it. Even the sound of the word is soothing and evocative. Posters of peace carry images

of green valleys, gentle streams, soft sunlight, animals grazing and trees giving shade. But the reality of our world is so different. The green of the valleys turns to dust in the heat and drought of global warming. The stream becomes a flood that drives people from the peace of their homes. The peaceful charm of the natural world gives way to the nameless terror of the man-made world.

And yet, as St Augustine wrote, we all long for peace, even those who build the weapons and send the missiles. They want peace on their own terms and go to war to secure it. Within nations people also act violently out of desire for peace on their own terms. Domestic violence expresses the frustration that other members of the family will not act in a way that brings peace to the violent. The violence in social media exchanges also often expresses the desire to remove a threat to someone's inner peace.

For Augustine, this meant that peace is more than the absence of war, and that the desire for peace is not enough. Making peace demands that we look beyond our own interests and what it takes to further them. We must desire what is good for all people, especially those who are most vulnerable. That attitude leads us to renounce violence as a way to peace and to be ready to yield to others.

Underlying this attitude is the conviction that each human being is precious and may not be used as an instrument for others' ends. This conviction, grounded in different ways, is enshrined in the rule of law, in the understanding of universal human rights and in national and international law. It is governed by rules concerning armed conflict, that respect the right to life of non-combatants. Their lives may not be taken in order to preserve more lives.

These go beyond the requirement that the cause of war be just, to demand that its goal be achievable and the benefit be proportionate to its harm. The loss of innocent lives must be avoided and be proportionate. They must not be the target of military action. These rules recognise that in war people will die but set moral limits on the taking of life. Underlying them is the high value of each human person.

Andrew Hamilton writes for Jesuit Communications and Jesuit Social Services.

## Everyone is welcome...

... to join us at our Christmas services as listed here.

Come and experience church in the round during Advent, when we are journeying to Christmas and beyond, moving ourselves through Advent, but resting by the campfire to regroup each Sunday.

Join us

## 'Journeying to Christmas'

† **Blue Christmas**  
Monday, 15 December 7pm

† **Christmas Eve - Family Service**  
Wednesday, 24 December 7pm

† **Christmas Day** Thursday  
25 December 10am-10:45am

**MORIALTA UNITING CHURCH**  
26 Chapel Street, Magill SA 5072  
8331 9344 [office@morialtauca.org.au](mailto:office@morialtauca.org.au)

## From our minister...

One of my favourite Christmas stories is A Christmas Carol, famously written by the 19th century author Charles Dickens. The life changing story of an old miser visited by three spirits, helping him to reflect on the uselessness of his life, and the loneliness of his impending death. Discovering he is still hale and hearty on Christmas morning, he dedicates his life anew to caring for the poor, particularly Tiny Tim. Since Victorian times, the season of Christmas encourages us again to relieve suffering in the name of the Christ Child. Christmas Bowl (known as Act for Peace the rest of the year) and Uniting World are vying for your Christmas charity dollar this Christmas season.

June's little stall at the Merry Magill Market raised over \$1000 for the important work at Uniting World, thanks to the generosity of some of our church people. The Uniting Church partners with local Christians throughout the world to better the lives of local people. June and I were privileged to view three separate projects funded by Uniting world while we were in Tonga a few weeks ago. We will elaborate during a service in January.

The question is, can we match the gifts to Christmas Bowl? Each week in Advent we are hearing from a different area of the world where the National Council of Churches also partners with local Christian groups to benefit the local people. We have heard so far the stories from Africa about chicken care in Zimbabwe, and in Ethiopia, aid for destitute families to cease begging and begin attending school. Such small things, but absolutely life changing for all those involved – including the Australians who give through their 18 different denominations!

May this season of Advent and Christmas bring you hope, peace, joy and love, and may your blessings extend to those you love, and just a little bit further to those others who also need your love and care. May this year be the best on record for both Uniting World and Christmas Bowl!

Anne B

## The Christmas Bowl

*From Act for peace*

For 76 years, Australians have given to the Christmas Bowl as an act of faith, generosity, and hope. Born in the aftermath of World War II, it began as a simple idea. Decades later, the Bowl still carries the prayers, gifts, and compassion of Christians across generations. It is a tradition that has quietly reshaped lives in places most of us will never see. Year after year, ordinary believers step forward in love, often unseen.



Please continue to support the Christmas Bowl and join us in praying and acting for peace in the world. Because everyone deserves a safe place to belong.

## A prayer for the Christmas Bowl

*By Rev Sandy Boyce*

Loving and gracious God, we gather with gratitude for the stories held in every Christmas Bowl, for the faithfulness of those who have passed on the practice of generosity.

We give thanks for the hope that this simple gesture continues to stir.

There is history in this bowl – history shaped by love offered to strangers, by generosity born of faith, by the quiet courage of people who refused to look away from suffering.

For seventy-six years, your people have lifted a simple bowl as a sign of compassion in a world of conflict, as a gesture of justice in a time of excess, as an act of peace amid the turmoil of war.

As we launch this year's Christmas Bowl, we remember those whose lives are fragile – families in Gaza, and in so many places of conflict, communities rebuilding after disaster, people displaced, hungry, or grieving.

May the gifts we share bring comfort, dignity, and hope.

May the symbol of the bowl continue to be a vessel of healing, a reminder of our shared humanity, and a sign of your peace, born again and again at Christmas.

In the name of Christ, whose love knows no borders, amen.

## UCA Day of Mourning – Sunday 25 January

For 30 years the Uniting Church has been in Covenant with the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC). Made in honesty about our history and in hope for the future, the Covenant commits us to work for a just church and nation.

Bound together by shared faith, witness and a dream for God's justice and healing, we walk together as First and Second Peoples, sharing in solidarity, joy and sorrow on the path to reconciliation.

As part of this enduring commitment and in this spirit, you are invited to mark the Uniting Church Day of Mourning on Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> January 2026.

For more go to <https://uniting.church/day-of-mourning-2026/>



## The Merry Magill Market

Despite Saturday 22<sup>nd</sup> November being cloudy and wet, the Merry Magill Market was a great day for renewing friendships and making new ones. The scones were delicious, the sausages tasty and the stalls overflowing with 'goodies' to buy.

The total amount raised on market day was \$7,149 which, although down from last year, was a great result. Thanks to all those who came along to enjoy the atmosphere, and special thanks to those who cooked, grew flowers, sewed and used their talents in many other ways.

### Total sales for all stalls

|               |          |                |                 |
|---------------|----------|----------------|-----------------|
| Books         | \$ 454   | Plants         | \$ 693          |
| Cakes         | \$ 1,482 | Raffle         | \$ 332          |
| Cake Raffle   | \$ 130   | Sausages       | \$ 279          |
| Clothes       | \$ 611   | Morning Tea    | \$ 803          |
| Craft & Gifts | \$ 1,027 | M Tea Expenses | (\$ 218)        |
| Gift Boxes    | \$ 1,556 | <b>Total</b>   | <b>\$ 7,149</b> |

A further \$580 has been raised since Saturday which brings the total to **\$7,729**.

Approximately \$1000 was also raised on the Uniting World stall organised by June.



## Congratulations to Anne and Bruce on their 50th wedding anniversary!



## The origin of the Christmas tree

The practice of having a decorated Christmas tree is common in many countries. But it was not always associated with Christmas.

Long before the "first Christmas" tree worship was common in Europe and many pagan Europeans brought a fir tree into the home during the winter solstice. They would also decorate a living tree outdoors with candles and ornaments symbolizing the sun, moon and stars on the tree of life. In Scandinavia, people decorated their homes and barns with greenery for New Year to ward off evil. Since evergreens symbolize eternal life, greenery helped Europeans visualize the spring to come.

When exactly Christians began to use fir trees as Christmas trees, is unknown. But the cities of Tallinn in Estonia and Riga in Latvia lay claim to the first documented use of a public tree at Christmas and New Year celebrations as early as the mid-15<sup>th</sup> century. The tradition has now become secular and Christmas trees may even be found in homes of people of other faiths.

Today, Christmas trees around the world are usually cut from fir, spruce or pine trees. But most are artificial!



## Friendship Group

*Margaret Whibley and Margaret Clogg*

Approximately 15 members attended our last meeting on 13<sup>th</sup> November. Julie Lomman and Margaret Whibley had selected about 24 hymns from the Australian hymn book for a sing-song. This brought back many memories of our much younger days before the Congregational, Presbyterian and Methodist churches amalgamated in 1977. As we are an “aged group,” everyone knew these hymns and sang extremely well.

The AGM also took place and the following members were elected to the committee for 2026.

Leader: Margaret Clogg

Recorder: Arlene Lomman

Treasurer: Arlene Lomman

Committee members:

Joan Wagner, Margaret Whibley, Linda Johnson

AV/IT: Ray Clogg

Morning tea co-ordinator: Mandy Wood.

Our final gathering for the year is the Christmas lunch at The Highbury Hotel on Thursday December 11<sup>th</sup> at 12 midday.

## The last of the ‘eighties’ celebrations!



Helen celebrated her eightieth birthday with her family in November.

Congratulations to all who joined the OBEs in 2025!

## Nativity scene in Morialta

Gaynor ‘found’ Jesus in the old stone horse trough in Morialta Park!



## News from the November Church Council Meeting

The full agenda of the November meeting is in the Church Council folder in the library, and the minutes will also be there once they are confirmed. In the meantime, here are some highlights! As always, if you have any questions, please talk to one of the members of Church Council.

- We endorsed the submission of a grant proposal under the Renew banner, open to us because 10 Morialta people had attended the Renew event recently. If successful, the grant will fund three one-day school holiday programs in 2026, designed to broaden our involvement in our local community.
- We confirmed that the office will close for the holidays a 1:00pm on Friday 19 December, and open for business again at 9:00am on Tuesday 27 January 2026. Nicole will be working, but the office not open to the public, from Monday 19 January.

- We confirmed that Morialta UC will be a pre-polling station for the state election to be held 21 March 2026, with restricted access to our facilities from 10-24 March, but not on the Sundays. Our Dawoodi Bohras friends are very supportive of this venture.
- We wish to strongly encourage all groups in the congregation, and Morialta representatives to wider church bodies, to make full use of the monthly *Beyond 2020 Vision* magazine to publicise and report on their decisions and activities, past and upcoming – we value this publication highly and undertake to do our bit and submit items whenever we have things to share.

The next Church Council meeting will be on 21st January 2026.

*Margaret Cargill, Deputy Council Chairperson*

## We are unique

*Adapted from “Thought for the Week” by Rev. David Fleming, a retired Anglican Priest, Littleport, Cambridgeshire*

*(Contributed by Marie Elson)*



In a letter to parents just before exams were to start – the teacher wrote: “I know you are all anxious for your child to do well, but please remember, amongst

the children in my class there is an artist, who doesn’t need to understand algebra; there is an entrepreneur, whose career won’t be built on history or English literature; there’s a

musician, whose chemistry marks won’t alter a single note of their progress; and there’s an athlete whose physical fitness is more important than physics. If your child does get top marks, that’s great! But if he or she doesn’t... please don’t take away their self-confidence and dignity. Tell them it’s ok, it’s just an exam!

Similarly, there is no exclusive, ‘intellectual’ entrance exam to the Christian faith. Karl Barth the German theologian was once asked if he could summarise his faith and belief in a simple way. He replied in the words of the children’s hymn, “Jesus loves me this I know...”

Everyone will experience that love in a host of different ways and each of our experiences will be unique.



## The Sacrament of the Eucharist Reality

*Adapted from a reflection by Father Richard Rohr,  
Center for Action and Contemplation*

When Jesus spoke the words “This is my Body,” was he speaking just about the bread right in front of him, or about the whole universe, about everything that is physical, material, and yet also spirit-filled?

This message is such a challenge that it takes a lifetime of practice and much vulnerability for it to sink in as the pattern of everything – not just one thing.

The bread and the wine together are stand-ins for the very elements of the universe, which also enjoy and communicate the incarnate presence. Why have we resisted this message so much?

Authentically eucharistic churches should have been the first to recognize the corporate, universal, and physical nature of the “Christification” of matter. Most do not realize the implications of what they have affirmed. The bread and wine are largely understood as an exclusive presence, when maybe their full function is to communicate a truly inclusive presence.

A true believer is eating what he or she is afraid to see and afraid to accept: The universe is the Body of God, both in its essence and in its suffering.

The Eucharist is an encounter of the heart when we recognize Christ’s Presence through our own offered presence. In the Eucharist, we move beyond mere words or rational thought and go to that place where we don’t talk about the Mystery anymore. Jesus did not say, “Think about this” or “Stare at this” or even “Worship this.” Instead, he said, “Eat this!”

We must keep eating and drinking the Mystery, until one day it dawns on us, in an undefended moment. Then we can henceforth trust and allow what has been true since the first moment of our existence. The Eucharist should jolt us into awareness that we have dignity and power flowing through us – and through everybody else.

This is why I must hold to the orthodox belief that there is ‘Real Presence’ in the bread and wine.

## God’s will be done!

I subscribe to a website called Progressing Spirit which occasionally has a Q&A section. One recent Q&A took my attention.

**Question:** After years of reading progressive Christian writing, I have stopped understanding God as an all-powerful person. In fact, I don’t think God is a person at all, but the name we give to sacred processes of life, love, and connection. This wouldn’t be a problem, but I love the language in the Jesus prayer about seeking for God’s will to be done. What could it mean for God’s will to be done if God is not a person with a will? How can I continue to pray this prayer and mean it?

**Answer by Dr. Amanda Udis-Kessler:** Personally, I have never experienced God as a being; the only way the sacred has ever made sense to me is as the ground of our being, the depth of our depths, or the love at our core. And I pray that God’s will be done in my life every morning. This doesn’t feel awkward or fake to me because, as I see it, the language in the prayer is metaphorical. Praying that prayer is a way I orient myself to the world, not a conversation with an entity who listens to my words and acts directly on them (or doesn’t).

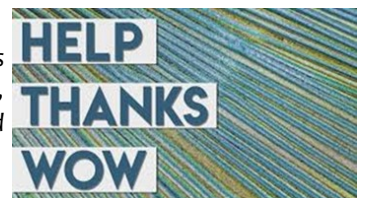
In John’s Gospel, Jesus has a number of “I am” sayings, claiming that he is the bread of life, the light of the world, and

the door of the sheep. In these passages, Jesus is not claiming that he is literal bread, a real candle, or an actual door. Rather, his way satisfies spiritual hunger. Living his teachings illuminates a way we can encounter the divine, And, if we follow him, we find wholeness and wellness.

For me, the Jesus prayer is similar. When I pray, “God, may your will be done in my life,” I am seeking to align myself with love, generosity, compassion, humility, hospitality, and all the kinds of goodness that Jesus taught and lived out. I’m acknowledging that however well-intended my own agenda is, there is a larger agenda out there, one in which love rather than my ego is the driving force, and I aim to have that larger agenda guide my beliefs, values, priorities, and work in the world. And I am striving to be open to what the apostle Paul called the fruit of the Spirit.

Anne Lamott wrote that the three essential prayers are “help!,” “thanks!”, and “wow!” For me, praying that God’s will be done captures and connects all three to who, and how, I want to be in the world.

Amanda Udis-Kessler writes about progressive religion, systemic inequality, ethics, and creativity.



## The origin of midnight mass



Many theologians believe the tradition known as midnight mass originated with pilgrims going to Bethlehem.

In the late 4<sup>th</sup> century, a pilgrim from Rome joined a group of Christians in a vigil on the night of January 5<sup>th</sup> – Christmas Eve in the Eastern tradition. The vigil was followed by a torchlight procession to Jerusalem, culminating with a dawn gathering. When the Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore was built in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Pope Sixtus III introduced midnight mass on Christmas Eve in the chapel, a tradition that has since spread to many Christian countries worldwide.

## Is Christianity relevant to the non-religious

From Gaynor

At Gateways recently we have been watching videos by Diana Butler Bass and reading her book, 'A People's History of Christianity.' These, and the group discussions, have prompted me to wonder, "How is Christianity relevant to those who are not religious or spiritual and who never will be?"

How is it relevant to the kind of people we come across frequently in everyday places who aren't disadvantaged, marginalised or isolated?

A subsequent situation at work provided an answer.

A colleague was being critical and judgemental, setting the stage for conflict. My response was to give a different perspective and not in any way fuel the negativity in the room. Afterwards I realised that this response highlights something that Christianity offers all people, everywhere.

When we follow the teachings of Jesus, whatever space we occupy will be safer by virtue of our presence. It could be a work space, a neighbourhood, a supermarket, or a social gathering. To that space, for however long we are there, we can bring truth, kindness, patience, generosity, and acceptance. This healing of spaces big and small is a valuable gift from Christianity to secular people wherever and whenever our paths cross.

At least my original question got answered!!

## The nine teachings of Jesus

From Kirk Struckmeyer – *An Unorthodox Faith*  
(read and discussed by Gateways Gatherers)

- Radical **love**
- Lavish **generosity**
- Extravagant **forgiveness**
- Inclusive **hospitality**
- Compassionate **action**
- Selfless **service**
- A passion for **justice**
- Simple **living**.

## Bridge impressions

A poem by Rosemerry Wahtola Trommer  
from *Radical Musing* by Geoff Boyce

Imagine if, instead of a wall, we built a bridge between us,  
a bridge made of every door we ever locked,  
every carpet we did not lay down for each other,  
every fear that's kept us from saying hello.  
I want to take the risk to walk toward you  
as through a sparkling sky  
entranced by the scent of greening all around -  
want to pause with you mid-bridge and notice how  
it can be so beautiful, this place between us.

Reflection by Geoff Boyce:

Reading this poem, I was struck by the implications of bridge-building. Intent, anticipation, action; and, as the poet infers, supplanting barriers erected out of fear. I love the way the poet celebrates the bridge, 'this place between us'.

What a wonderful image to contemplate!



## Understanding the Advent wreath

The word Advent comes from the Latin word *adventus*, meaning "coming" or "arrival." For Christians, Advent is an important time of preparation. It is a period which marks the four Sundays before December 25th. Advent emphasizes themes such as hope, peace, joy, and love, helping us prepare our hearts and minds for the celebration of Christmas.

The use of the wreath and candles during Advent is a longstanding tradition that was originally adopted by Christians in the Middle Ages as part of their spiritual preparation for Christmas. The wreath is typically made of evergreen branches and holds four candles, each representing one of the four weeks of Advent.

The wreath and candles are full of symbolism tied to the Christmas season. The circle of the wreath, which has no beginning or end, symbolizes the eternity of God, the immortality of the soul, and the everlasting life we find in Christ. The wreath itself, which is made of various kinds of evergreens, signifies continuous life.

Laurel signifies victory over persecution and suffering. Pine, holly, and yew signify immortality. Cedar signifies strength and healing; pine cones symbolize life and resurrection and the wreath as a whole is meant to remind us of both the immortality of our souls and God's promise of everlasting life to us through Christ.

The four candles on the Advent wreath represent the light of Christ entering the world. One candle is lit each Sunday, marking the progression of the four weeks of Advent.



## A Hawaiian Christmas Eve

From Helena Begg

In 2016 our family celebrated Christmas in the small town of Koloa, on the island of Kauai in Hawaii.

Christmas Eve worship was an interesting experience at the Koloa Union Church.



The call to worship involved the traditional call on the conch shell, the minister wore a colourful, flowery shirt along with a stole made up of a fresh vine, and the choir sang some of the carols in the Hawaiian language, with their beautiful, rich voices.

The sermon took us to more familiar ground, as it was based around the book "The First Christmas" by Marcus J. Borg and John Dominic Crossan.

At the close of the service we lit candles and sang Silent Night, with some verses sung in Hawaiian by the choir, and afterwards we were warmly welcomed to join everyone present for refreshments and fellowship.

Mele Kalikimaka - Merry Christmas!

Silent night, holy night,  
All is calm, all is bright  
Round yon virgin mother and child.  
Holy infant, so tender and mild,  
Sleep in heavenly peace,  
Sleep in heavenly peace.

Po la'i e, po kamaha'o,  
Maluhia, malamalama  
Ka makuahine aloha e  
Me ke keiki hemolele e  
Moe me ka maluhia lani  
Moe me ka maluhia lani.

## Réveillon de Noël (Christmas Eve) in Québec

Readers of the Chief Inspector Armand Gamache Series by Louise Penny will already know that In Québec, French-speaking families celebrate Christmas on the evening of December 24. It's a late-night to early-morning event, hence the term réveillon, which comes from the French word réveil, meaning "wakening." The tradition originated in France and is similarly celebrated in New Orleans (USA).

Traditionally, families would attend midnight mass before returning home, where Santa Claus would magically appear to dole out gifts. Once these were opened, everyone moved to the table for a gluttonous meal of tourtière (minced meat pie), mashed potatoes, turkey with stuffing and coquilles Saint-Jacques (scallops in the shell), followed by bûche de Noël (Yule log cake) and sucre à la crème (made from sugar and cream). For those still standing, the festivities might last until dawn.

## Noche de las velitas (Night of the little candles) in Colombia

On December 7, Colombians honour Mary, the mother of Jesus, at the Feast of the Immaculate Conception with Noche de las Velitas (Night of the Little Candles). This celebration marks the start of the holiday season. Colombians light up their homes and streets with millions of white and coloured candles in patterned paper lanterns. The Night of the Little Candles was once a small-scale, family-centric affair, but over the years the decorations have become more creative and sophisticated, and electric lights are often used. Celebrations have become increasingly public too, with music and fireworks as well as food markets.



## It is as if infancy were the whole of incarnation

by Luci Shaw

One time of the year the new-born child is everywhere,  
planted in madonnas' arms, hay mows,  
stables in palaces or farms,  
or quaintly, under snowed gables,  
gothic angular or baroque plump,  
naked or elaborately swathed,  
encircled by Della Robia wreaths,  
garnished with whimsical partridges and pears,  
drummers and drums, lit by oversize stars,  
partnered with lambs,  
peace doves, sugar plums, bells,  
plastic camels in sets of three  
as if these were what we need for eternity.  
But Jesus the Man is not to be seen.  
We are too wary, these days, of beards and sandalled feet.

Yet if we celebrate,  
let it be that he has invaded our lives with purpose,  
striding over our picturesque traditions,  
our shallow sentiment,  
overturning our cash registers,  
wielding his peace like a sword,  
rescuing us into reality  
demanding much more than the milk and the softness  
and the mother warmth of the baby in the storefront creche,  
(only the Man would ask all, of each of us)  
reaching out always, urgently,  
with strong effective love  
(only the Man would give his life  
and live again for love of us).  
Oh come, let us adore him – Christ the Lord.

## Can Christians be makers of peace?

*Camaldolese monk and songwriter Cyprian Consiglio shares a memory of visiting Israel and Palestine.*

One of the strongest images I have from my brief but intense pilgrimage to the Holy Land is of Rabbi Eli, who was probably the closest thing to one of the Hebrew prophets I have ever met.

This was an Israeli who had been arrested several times for standing in solidarity with Palestinians, protesting the human rights violations against them.... We were standing at a high spot in East Jerusalem looking out over the disputed territories, and Rabbi Eli was pointing out the various iterations of the security wall making its serpentine way through Palestinian land. He was showing us a map of a new settlement about to begin construction in defiance of the UN and the US, which would effectively cut Palestine in half, thus preventing any possibility of Palestinians ever having a contiguous piece of land to call their state and effectively destroying the so-called two-state solution. Rabbi Eli said, "And so we are asking ourselves: What time is it? Is it a quarter to midnight? Is it five minutes to midnight? With this development I think it's one minute to midnight. It's almost too late."

That moment seared so deeply in my mind that on the way home on the plane I wrote a whole song about it called "One Minute to Midnight," the closest thing to a '60s-style protest

song I had ever written. One of the verses included lines that were my sadly ironic version of the famous verses from the prophet Isaiah: "We've beaten our ploughshares back into swords / and made spears of our pruning hooks." And I added, "We've turned revelation to a battle of words / and made weapons of our holy books."



My friends told me that when I came back from that trip to the Holy Land my preaching changed. It was more "prophetic." I was fired up by the frustration and energized by the agitation that I felt witnessing up close a situation that was patently unsustainable and obviously unjust, but with no visible solution and no one with enough real moral authority to "fix" everything. And I think I felt like never before the challenge of being a follower of Jesus, and I glimpsed what a privileged position we Christians have there in the Holy Land as well as in the world at large, to stand in the breach between our Jewish and Muslim brothers and sisters and dare to preach love of our enemies, dare to believe that peace if possible, dare to take Jesus at his word.

## Hearing another story

*Adapted from an article by Father Richard Rohr – Center for Action and Contemplation*

Father Richard Rohr explains how the Gospels impart a message of liberation, particularly for people pushed to the margins of society:

The vast majority of people throughout history have been poor, oppressed, or in some way "on the margins." They would have read history in terms of a need for change, but most of history has been written and interpreted from the side of the winners. The unique exception is the revelation called the Bible, which is an alternative history from the side of the often enslaved and oppressed people of ancient Israel, culminating in the scapegoat figure of Jesus himself.

In the Gospels, the poor, people with disabilities, tax collectors, sinners, and outsiders tend to follow Jesus. It's those on the inside and the top—the Roman occupiers, the chief priests and their conspirators—who crucify him. Shouldn't that tell us something significant about perspective? Every viewpoint is a view from a point. We must be able to critique any winner's perspective if we are to see a fuller truth.

Liberation theology—which focuses on freeing people from religious, political, social, and economic oppression—is often dismissed by official Christianity. Perhaps that's not surprising when we consider who interpreted the Scriptures for the last seventeen hundred years. The empowered clerical class enforced their own perspective instead of that of the marginalized who first received the message with such

excitement and hope. Once Christianity became the established religion of the Roman Empire (after 313 CE), we largely stopped reading the Bible from the side of the poor and the oppressed. We read it from the side of the political establishment and the usually comfortable priesthood instead of from the side of people hungry for justice and truth. Shifting our priorities to make room for the powerless instead of accommodating the powerful is the only way to detach religion from its common marriage to power, money, and self-importance.

When Scripture is read through the eyes of vulnerability—what Catholics call the "preferential option for the poor" or the "bias from the bottom"—it will always be liberating and transformative. Scripture will not be used to oppress or impress. The question is no longer, "How can I maintain the status quo?" (which often happens to benefit me), but "How can we all grow and change together?" We would have no top to protect, and the so-called "bottom" becomes the place of education, real change, and transformation for all.

The bottom is where we have no privilege to prove or protect but much to seek and become. Jesus called such people "blessed" (Matthew 5:3). Dorothy Day said much the same: "The only way to live in any true security is to live so close to the bottom that when you fall you do not have far to drop, and you do not have much to lose." From that place, where few would choose to be, we can be used as instruments of transformation and liberation for the rest of the world.