

# *Green Grass and Blue Sky*



Many of us have recently experienced drought, bushfire and the eventual arrival of life-giving rain. Ground that was bare earth covered with a scattering of dead leaves and stones has now become green grass and, perhaps, even lawn! The sky, which in November and December was hidden behind dense white smoke which made it difficult for us to breathe and see, is now revealed with glimpses of the blue colour we once took for granted.

In other places of Australia fires continue to burn and the possibility of more fires breaking out remains. Nevertheless, now might be a good time to pause and reflect on how our experiences of living through the fires and welcome rain have changed us.

During the past months we could have pleaded with God for rain, become angry with those we thought had failed to prevent our predicament, feared the power of the fires and been anxious for the future of our country. For some there was grief over the loss of loved

ones, family members and friends, and the destruction of homes, livelihoods, stock and wildlife.

Some buildings were saved by the efforts of firefighters or a change of wind direction, while others were burnt down. God did not always answer our prayers in ways that we desired. Were we tempted to give up believing in the one 'up there', as I overheard in a conversation recently? Or did we hold fast to our faith in God who stayed with us as we moved through our anger, fear, pain and relief?

At Christmas, we Christians celebrated God coming to be with us, Jesus born as a human baby, Emmanuel. Later we were reminded that God continued to be with Joseph, Mary and the baby Jesus when they fled to Egypt. But what about the children in Bethlehem who were killed by Herod's soldiers? Was God present there?

Continually living in an environment of extreme weather events, can produce feelings of anxiety and despair. We might ask, "Why doesn't God intervene and stop it all?" Alternatively, the same experience can strengthen our faith in God's loving presence with us and others.

Throughout the drought and fires God's love and compassion was revealed in the heroic acts of people. It was shown when friends and strangers risked their lives to help one another. It was also present in the time given by people gently tending injured animals and reviving plants.

During the recent Australia Day celebrations, people talked about the importance of mateship, and described caring acts as being the 'Australian Way' of behaving. But do not people in other countries at times of crisis behave in compassionate ways? We may want to identify loving acts as Christian acts, but there are many people who do not claim to be Christians who also show kindness to others. I suggest, especially if we think of Australia as a multicultural nation, that actions of love and care illustrate the words in Genesis 1:26 where God said, "Let us make humankind in our image, according to our likeness." As Christians we believe that *all* people are given life by the Spirit of God, a God whose essence is love. Caring and generous deeds express good human behaviour *and* something of God's love.

When we read the Gospels, the words and behaviour of Jesus affirm that God's love is for all people. Men, women, children, Gentiles, Jews, Roman soldiers, a criminal hanging on a cross, lepers and a woman known as a sinner were all loved by Jesus.

The basic teaching Jesus gave to his followers was to love their neighbours, including strangers and even enemies. In Jesus' life, death and resurrection, love was revealed as the meaning of life. It is what we are to show in our lives and give thanks for in the lives of others whatever their race, age or gender. Further, if we believe in a loving God who created and gives life not only to human beings but also to the whole universe, then it is logical for us to extend our love to include the earth of which we are a part. Today we have the power to destroy earth by violence, ignorance and thoughtlessness, or to preserve and care for it and all living on it.

As we reflect on our recent experiences let us look around at our changed environment, green grass and blue sky, with thanksgiving and appreciation. We are reminded that new life can come out of adversity, whether it be drought, fire, grief or something else. Our life can and does change. For example, what now do we value most, has our treatment of water altered, and are we ready to change how we care for others, people and nature, so earth can continue to be a home for so much wonderful life?

With God always beside us and guiding us, let us move forward in love, healing and peace to a renewed life in Christ.

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