

# **Our World Today..!**

The image features a central graphic of two hands in silhouette, one from the top and one from the bottom, cupping a glowing globe. The background is a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds. The text is overlaid on this scene.

**Christians  
can make  
a difference**

**Bishop Bill Ray**

## *About this year's writer*

Bishop Bill Ray is the Bishop of North Queensland and has been so for the past decade. Prior to his appointment to North Queensland he held several parish appointments including an archdeaconry and was for a time the national director of General Board of Religious Education. He has also been a Diocesan Youth Officer and Ministry Training Officer.

Bishop Bill is married to Robin who is an Associate Dean in the College of Medicine and Dentistry at James Cook University Townsville. They both grew up in Gippsland on dairy farms. For a time Bill did some sheep shearing including demonstrations for school children! They both have lived and ministered in the Dioceses of Gippsland, Brisbane, Rockhampton and Melbourne as well as living two years in the Diocese of North Carolina in the United States where the Bishop undertook a Masters of the Religious Education degree at Duke University.

Bishop Bill and Robin have two adult children. Their daughter is married and lives in Dallas Texas. She and her husband have three young sons. As grandparents they travel each year to the United States to enjoy the company of this family and see how much the grandchildren have grown and developed. Their son and his partner live in Melbourne where he works for the Royal Flying Doctor Service.

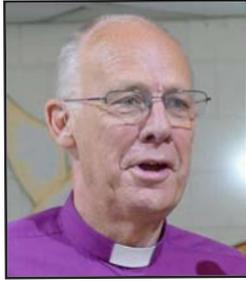
Bill and Robin walk several kilometres most days. During holidays they like to hike various parks and recently hiked Dartmoor in the U.K. Bill enjoys gardening and reading biographies. One of his big hopes for the future is that he will learn book binding! It has been a dream for some time.



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*The Rt Rev'd Bill Ray*

Certain moments or particular situations in life can have a considerable influence on how we face the future. For me, one occurred several years ago when I had a retired priest staying with family in the Parish where I was the Vicar. The retired priest was very unwell and he knew that he did not have long before he would enter his eternal rest. So, before he died, I asked him if he would like to celebrate the Eucharist and preach at a mid week service. He was hesitant at first, but then said yes. The sermon he delivered was very powerful. He said if he had his time over again, as a priest, he would focus more on the hard sayings of Jesus and not just go to the so called “easy passages” thinking everything is “rosy in the garden” and we can coast along without being challenged.

Some examples of the hard sayings of Jesus are:

Love your enemies and bless those who curse you (Matthew 22:39)  
Daughter against mother and mother against daughter (Luke 12:48-53)  
Let the dead bury the dead (Luke 9:60)

He concluded by saying that it was when he truly focused on and grappled with the hard sayings of Jesus that he grew as a Christian.

I have often thought about this sermon and asked myself what would I do if I had my time over again. The reality is, I still have the time to make a difference. I just need to get on with it! I am a cradle Anglican. I have been involved in a wide range of ministries over the years. I am now a bishop, but I am still Bill the Christian. Being a Christian has been a blessing for me, but at times it has also had its challenges and struggles; none the less, a blessed time.

I am keen to see the Church grow, but more importantly, I am keen to see people grow in their faith and others come to faith in Jesus Christ. For me, I must be more intentional in bringing people to faith in Jesus Christ. I think I have been more of an “apologist” (\*\*Note 1) than a person seeking to make disciples. As a Church and as Christians we are called to make disciples. So my focus is Matthew 20:19, “*Go and make disciples ...*”, and the theme for these studies, “Our World Today, Christians can make a difference”. I am using the Readings for Lent, Year B, and I will be referring back to the Ten Commandments and Lord’s Prayer in some studies.

Being a disciple means being intentional. Lent is a season of the Church Year where we are called to be intentional and make a difference. The season of Lent is a gift. Let us take this gift and make

this Lent count. May we really grapple with issues of the faith and how we live into the Gospel message so that others may “Taste and see the goodness of the Lord” (Psalm 34:8). As we seek to be faithful and follow

the Light of Christ in this modern world, we can make a difference knowing that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8).

# The Empty Chair

## Outreach

**“Suggestion”**

Print out the pdf on our web site and mount it on thick card.

Home study groups are the life of any parish serious about numerical and spiritual growth.

Those who join a Lent Home Group are truly blessed by the sense of gathering together, but surely this is also something worth sharing.

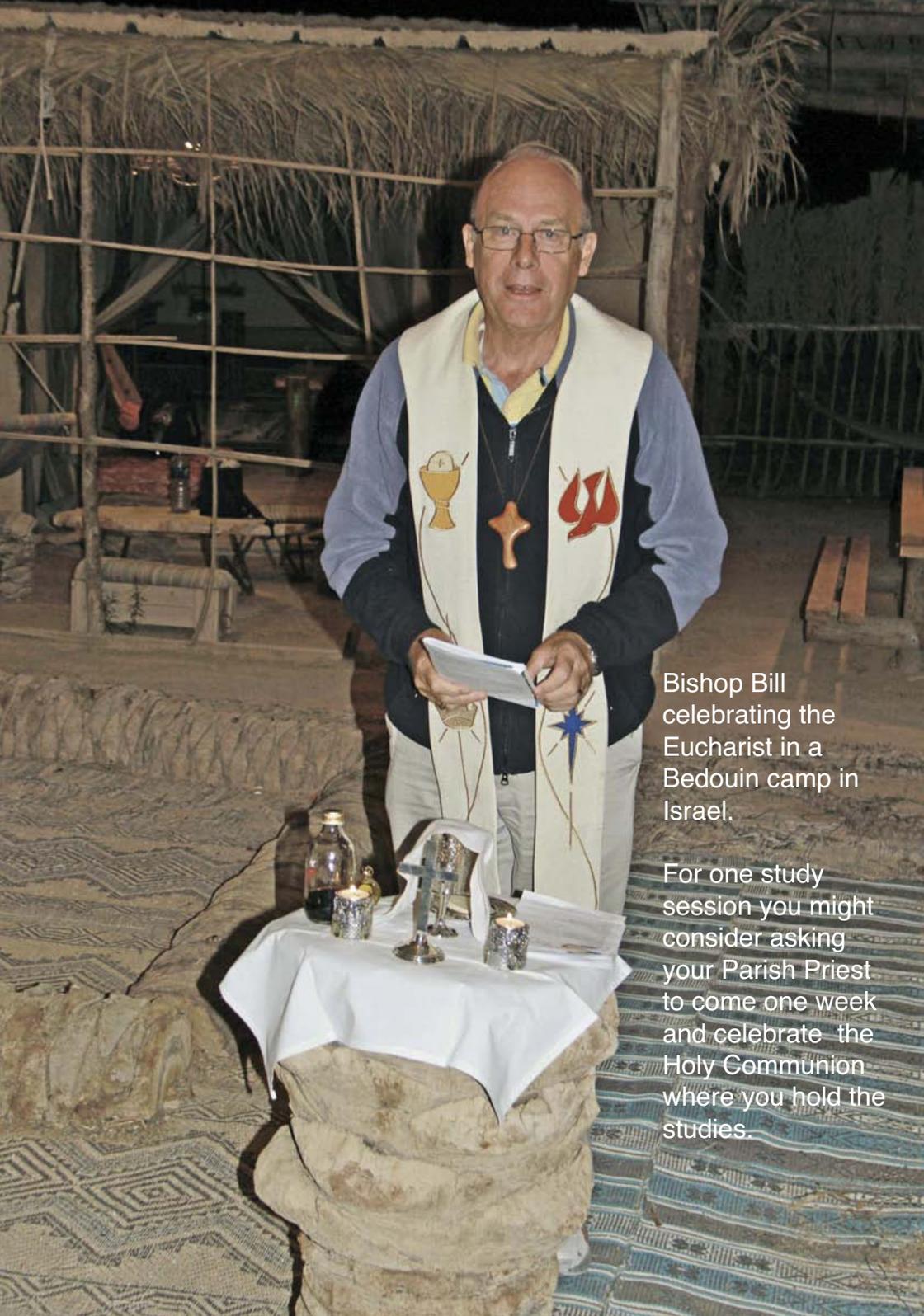


Why not add an empty chair with a sign on it encouraging each member to take seriously the task of inviting a new member to come and share with them. (It is how your groups can grow)

It does not matter if the group has just started or going for a few weeks.

It is an opportunity for other parishioners to experience in a non threatening way the joys that can come from joining one of these groups. (and especially if they continue on after lent, fortnightly, monthly or whenever. What a blessing to the parish this would be)

What have you got to lose?



Bishop Bill celebrating the Eucharist in a Bedouin camp in Israel.

For one study session you might consider asking your Parish Priest to come one week and celebrate the Holy Communion where you hold the studies.

## Knowing Jesus creates the differences

Ash Wednesday, the Wednesday before the first Sunday of Lent is still a key day in the Church's calendar. The sentence of Scripture for Ash Wednesday is from the Prophet Joel (2:13):

*“rend your hearts and not your clothing.*

*Return to the Lord, your God, for he is gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love”.*

Lent is about addressing matters of the heart and not of appearances. Lent is a time where we examine our lives in the light of the teachings of Christ. Lent is also a time when we Christians seek to know Christ better, so that we can make a difference within ourselves and within the communities where we live. Lent is a time to make sure that our Christian lives are so inviting that people will want to know what we believe and why we follow our Lord and Saviour. As Christians, we can not invite people to become disciples of Christ if we are not showing the love of God and God's forgiveness in our lives. In other words we have to “walk the talk” or “live the faith”.

The prayer for Ash Wednesday and Lent, which we will use as our opening prayer, reminded us that in Lent we are to honour all that God has given and blessed us with in this life. We know that God will forgive us our sins (that is, the thoughts, words or actions that separate us from God) if we are truly sorry and seek to amend our lives according to the ways of Christ.

God forgives us because we are a covenant people. In the Genesis reading we learn that God established a covenant with Noah. God said that he would never again cut off all flesh through a flood. God provides us with a sign, with a rainbow, to remind us of the covenant.

Living the Christian life does not mean that life will always go smoothly. The important thing to remember is that in all aspects of our life, our Lord is with us. In Matthew 28:20b, we have these words, *“And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”* Jesus is always with us, the question is, “Are we always with Jesus?” Also, the first of the Ten Commandments clearly states, “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; you shall have no other gods before me”. Christianity is a monotheistic faith, that is, we worship only one God. The second commandment states, *“You shall not make for yourself a graven image”*. It is so easy to worship things, events and situations rather than God. There are many competing influences out there in the world, but we must be intentional, we worship only one God.

The Book of Psalms covers all aspects of life, the highs and the lows, the ups and the downs. I am sure that is why the Psalms are so popular. A portion of Psalm 25 has much to say about being a disciple of Christ. We are reminded to put our hope in the Lord, we are to seek the Lord's ways, and we ask God not

to remember the transgressions of our youth but show mercy upon us. Verse ten sums it up so well, “All the paths of the Lord are faithful and true: for those who keep his covenant and his commandments”.

In the first letter of Peter (1 Peter 3: 18-22) we are reminded that Christ suffered once and for all for our sins. As Christians, we too will suffer from time to time, because the Gospel message is counter to the standards and ways of the world. Being Christian means not conforming to this world (Roman 12:2). Rather, we are to be transformed by the renewal of our mind. We are reminded that we will be tested so that we can discern the will of God.

People who have come to know Christ and wish to follow Christ often seek baptism.

Baptism is commitment to Christ. In the life of the early Church, mainly adults were baptised. Some denominations still practice adult or believers baptism, while other practice what is known as infant baptism. For those who were baptised as infants, the expectation is they will come to confirm the baptismal promises for themselves. The promises that were made on their behalf when they were infants, are confirmed in the Confirmation service. Confirmation is a key time in a person’s adult life of discipleship. It is a time to stand up and be counted for Christ.

The promises made in baptism and confirmation vary from

denomination to denomination, but in essence they include: turning to Christ, repenting of sin, rejecting selfish living and all that is false and unjust and renouncing evil. The godparents and sponsors promise to bring the young baptised person up in the life and faith of Christ. For adults who are being baptised, they enter a new way of living, a new way of life as one of Christ’s disciples.

The Gospel reading from Mark’s Gospel informs us that Jesus was baptised by John in the River Jordan. As Jesus came up out of the water, there was the voice from heaven which said, “*You are my beloved Son; and with you I am well pleased*” (Mark 1:11). The Baptism of Jesus presents a challenge. In the previous paragraph we named aspects of baptism and one was the repentance of sin. John’s baptism was one of repentance, but our Lord was sinless. However, for our Lord, his baptism highlighted four aspects. First, for Jesus it was a moment of decision. Jesus moved from his life as a carpenter to his public recognition as the Son of God, revealing the nature of God. Christ had to move forward in a new way and in a new space. Second, it was a moment of “identification, “*You are my beloved Son*”. (Mark 1:11) Third, Jesus, knew of God’s approval, “*I am well pleased*” finally it was a time of equipping, “the Spirit descended upon him like a dove”.

For Christ’s disciples, there is that moment of decision. For some, that decision can be dramatic, such as

Paul's conversion on the Damascus Road (Acts 9); while for others there is that gradual process of nurturing and supporting what takes place until they realise that they have to say I am a disciple of Christ and my way of living is Christianity. We need to identify with our Lord who loves and forgives us. Above all we need to be equipped for our ministry, strengthened and sustained by the the Spirit of the Living God. It is important that with each decision people identify with Christ, that they know they are a child of God and are equipped by the Spirit of the living God for their ministry.

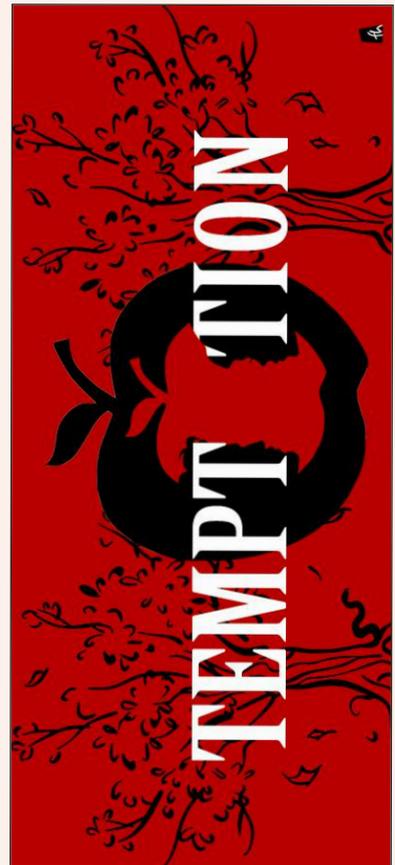
Verses 12 and 13, informs us that Jesus was in the wilderness and he was tempted by Satan. There are very few people who follow Christ, who have not had some sort of wilderness experience as they live out their faith in Christ. At such times it is important to maintain our spiritual disciplines. As the words of Psalm 25:1 state, "*In you O Lord, my God, have I put my hope*".

It is in Matthew's Gospel that we have the detailed account of the temptations, turning stones to bread, Jesus being invited to throw himself from the temple and Jesus being shown the kingdoms of the world (Matthew 4:1-11). In each case, Jesus answered the devil with a quote from Scripture. We too are tempted. It is important for us to know the Word of the Living God so that we can respond to the times when we are tempted.

The final section of the Gospel reading, states that Jesus

commenced his Galilean ministry exhorting people "to repent and believe in the gospel".

It is in believing the Gospel and truly repenting that we make a difference both in our faith communities and the general communities where we live and work.



## Getting started, getting to know each other better ...

Some domestic arrangements at the start, so people feel comfortable:

- \* Some groups meet in the same place each week. Other groups move from place to place each week. If it is the latter, be clear where you are meeting and when and make sure people have clear directions. Remember, places can look different at night.
- \* If you decide as a group to have morning tea or supper you may draw up a simple roster to share the responsibility.
- \* Check to see if anyone has dietary requirements. Also, be aware that during Lent some people may be fasting. That is, they give up certain food or drink and then make a thank offering to some mission for the work in the Kingdom of God. Many who fast give additional time to prayer. These disciplines are not as well known today, but it is important that we are aware that some people may be fasting so that we can respect them and their spiritual disciplines.
- \* Some members may have mobility and/or other health issues. Check to see if anyone needs an upright chair as opposed to a lounge chair. If you are moving from home to home it is important that people who use “wheelie walkers” or wheelchairs are able to get around.
- \* You may like to check to see if anyone has a birthday during Lent.

### NOW A FEW THOUGHTS TO “BREAK THE ICE”

- \* Share something about yourself and/or your present situation that will enable the group to know you better and will build up the community life of the group.
- \* Which worship service do you attend and why?
- \* What feeds your faith?
- \* How were you introduced to the Christian faith?
- \* What are some of your expectations of this Lenten study.  
(You may like to record them and during Holy Week check to see if your expectations have been met.)
- \* If someone asked you why you believe in Jesus Christ, your answer would be .....?



## Welcome

See suggestions on Page 8



## Prayer

### Opening Prayer:

Let us give thanks to God for ..... (add your thanks)

Let us pray for ... (world or local issues)

Pray God's blessing on our group as it meets. May we open our hearts and minds to hear the message of God.

Pray the Lenten Prayer together:

**Almighty and everlasting God,  
you hate nothing that you have made,  
and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent:  
create and make in us new and contrite hearts,  
that we, worthily lamenting our sins,  
and acknowledging our wretchedness,  
may obtain of you, the God of all mercy,  
perfect remission and forgiveness;  
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen**



## Scripture

Genesis 9:8-17

Psalms 25:1-10

1 Peter 3:18-22

Mark 1:9-15

### Discussion Questions:

[The leader makes a selection from the following questions. Some groups may discuss all the questions, while others may only address a few questions. Like people, each group is different. The purpose of the questions is to encourage thought and the sharing of ideas so that each person maybe strengthened in their faith journey. What you choose will vary from person to person and group to group.]



## Questions

1. What significance does Ash Wednesday have in your faith journey?
2. “Rend your heart and not your clothing/garment”. What does this quote mean to Christians today?
3. Each week at worship we confess our sin and we hear that God forgives us of our sin, if we truly repent. One of the reasons Paul wrote to the Corinthian Church was because there was division among believers. What are some of the issues we have to address so that as Christians, our lives show that we are forgiven people?
4. What are some of the “graven images” that exist in Australian society that attract people to worship them? How do we as Christians show that we “worship only one God”?
5. What are some of the understandings of baptism today in the broader community? Discuss what you would say on a poster stating the nature of baptism. (In fact if there are any artistic people in the group, they may sketch a poster. Have a go!)
6. In the Christendom model of Church<sup>\*\*Note 2</sup>, the expectation was that everyone would be a Christian. However, those days have passed. People come to faith in a number of ways. Share how you came to faith. After people have shared a little of their journey, the group may spend time sharing insights and learnings.
7. How do you continue to equip yourself for your ministry? What is the place of prayer and Scripture reading for you? Another way of expressing this; how do you top up your spiritual tank?
8. Members of the group may like to share how they have addressed temptation, something of the struggle at the time and the insights gained.
9. It has been said, that we can all relate to the book of Psalms (sometimes referred to as the Psalter) because they cover all aspects of life. What is the place of the Psalms in your life?
10. Jesus exhorted the people to “repent and believe the Gospel”. How can we live out our Lord’s commission in our community.



### Closing Prayer:

1. Identify any issues that were addressed in the study group and bring them to God in prayer.
2. Members of the group may ask for particular prayer points.
3. Close with the Lord's Prayer.

**Our Father, who art in heaven,  
hallowed be thy name,  
thy kingdom come,  
thy will be done  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our trespasses  
as we forgive those who trespass against us.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil.  
For thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory  
for ever and ever. Amen.**

[If the group is meeting in a different location each week, please be clear as to where the group will meet next week.]



We all live busy lives, but to get the best out of these studies, it is important to come prepared. Before each study, ensure you have read the readings and the background to them in the preparation material at the beginning of each week.