

A row of white canoes with green interiors and yellow oars, floating on water. The canoes are arranged in a line, and their reflections are visible in the calm water. The text "Bishop Bill Ray" is overlaid on the upper left portion of the image.

Bishop Bill Ray

Faith Rudder

A Covenant with God



Bishop Bill Ray
Bishop of Nth Queensland

Bishop Bill Ray is currently the Anglican Bishop of North Queensland.

In 1980 while attending a General Board of Religious Education (GBRE) Conference, Bill was influenced by John Westerhoff who said that the school based model of Christian Education for Parish life was bankrupt, because in parish life, Christian Education is not compulsory.

Coming from a trained teacher background this insight was a shock, but also a source of motivation. The statement has led to a lifelong interest in Christian Education at the parish level. Bill went overseas to study. He continues his reading in this area and has a passionate desire to help people grow in their Christian faith as well as helping people to come to faith in Christ.

Related to this, Bill has a passion to increase Biblical literacy and understanding of the Scriptures in our parishes so that people will connect the story of God to their own lives and understand that Christianity is a way of life.

Bill has served in three parishes, one in Rockhampton and two in Melbourne.

Bishop Bill is married to Robin who is an academic in the School of Medicine and Dentistry at James Cook University in Townsville. They have two adult children and two lively grandsons.

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Bishop Bill Ray

Introduction:

Every photograph tells a story. The front cover of this study is fascinating; a photograph of so much unfulfilled potential. There are a number of boats, all without an outboard motor or oars in the rollicks. I am reminded of times when I have been on holidays at the beach and seen all these boats lined up for hire. Without the outboard engine or the oars, the boats are only a visual image. The boats of themselves achieve nothing. It is only when the outboard engine is put on or the oars placed in the rollicks and someone starts the motor or rows the boat, that the boat fulfils its purpose. The potential of the dormant boats becomes a reality.

There have been times in my Christian pilgrimage when I have been a little like the boats in the photograph. So much potential for the Kingdom of God, but I just have not quite engaged the engine or oars to go forth in faith.

The liturgical season of Lent is a gift to us from the Church. It is season of forty days that affords us the opportunity to make sure the engine of faith is tuned and turned on or that the oars are in the rollicks ready

for use; waiting upon God our rudder. In so doing, the boats that represent our faith are ready to go in forth to advance the Kingdom of God.

This Lenten Study is based on the theme of covenant and will draw upon the Old Testament readings for Year B in the season of Lent, using An Australian Lectionary.

During the five studies we will examine covenants between:

- God and Noah;
- God and Abraham;
- God and Israel with Moses;
- address some of the implications of living into the covenant, and
- conclude with the new covenant written upon the heart as outlined in Jeremiah.

Covenants are fundamental in both the Old Testament and New Testament. Covenants are between God and the people of God. In the biblical covenants it is God who takes the initiative; it is God who sets out the terms. We, the servants of God, live into the covenant and enjoy the blessings.

As we study the various covenants and consider the implications for our daily Christian lives, may this Lent enable us to tune our engines or engage our oars, keeping God as the faith rudder to direct our Christian pilgrimage.

Bill Ray



Tibetan Prayer Flag

Three quotes re prayer:



"If I fail to spend two hours in prayer each morning, the devil gets the victory through the day. I have so much business I cannot get on without spending three hours daily in prayer.

Martin Luther

"God does nothing except in response to believing prayer." *John Wesley* (Famous evangelist who spent 2 hours daily in prayer)



"There is not in the world a kind of life more sweet and delightful than that of a continual conversation with God." *Brother Lawrence*



***Three ladies
who had a
strong faith
rudder***

Before I was ordained, I was told by a wise clergyperson that there are many lay people out there who are more faithful and devout than a lot of the

clergy. At the time my mind went to a lady that Robin and I knew who had multiple health issues, and I thought how true. Her faith rudder was prayer. Just by being with her, you knew that prayer was her life. She often said there was not much she could do in the physical sense, but she could pray.

Several years later when I was a parish priest, there was a Confirmation and one of the candidates was an older person. As the Confirmation was taking place I could see that a parishioner had tears running down her cheeks. After the service I went up to her and asked her if she was O.K. I will never forget her reply and my thought at the time. She said that she had been praying for about thirty three years that the person who was confirmed would state publicly that he turned to Christ. At the time my thought was how wonderful, how faithful, and I asked myself had I deliberately prayed for someone for thirty three years.

Like the first lady, this second lady was also a faithful person of prayer. You knew that they had faith as their rudder and prayer was a key aspect in maintaining the direction they took in life. They knew the covenants of God. They knew that God set the path they were to follow and in following, they received the blessings of God in their life.

The other evening at an ecumenical gathering, a gentleman shared how his grandmother had very little in terms of material possessions, but her constant line was "I enjoy the blessings of God". That is one of the delights of living into the God's covenant; we enjoy the blessings that flow from our relationship with God.

Questions:

- Is prayer a key aspect of our faith rudder?
- Does our trust in God enable us to enjoy and live into the blessings?
- What can we learn from each of three ladies that will assist us to ensure that our rudder is centred on God?

For the next five weeks, we agree to the following commitment as a group.

ATTENDANCE:

To give priority to group meetings.

PARTICIPATION:

To make every effort to participate fully within the group.

CONFIDENTIALITY:

To keep confidential everything that is shared.

ACCOUNTABILITY:

To accept the challenge to reach the goals we have set ourselves.

ACCESSIBILITY:

To give one another the right to call at any time for spiritual help in time of need - even in the middle of the night.

EVANGELISM:

To make an effort to each encourage one person to join this group.



SPECIFICS

We will meet on(Day of week)

We will meet at(Home/Place)

The meeting will begin at..... and close at

We agree to leave by so as not to over stay our welcome.

GROUND RULES

Refreshments

Baby Sitting

Newcomers.....

Absence.....

I WILL TRY WITH GOD'S HELP TO BE A REGULAR, FAITHFUL, CARING MEMBER OF THIS GROUP.

Names of Group Members

Phone

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

Remember: *While it is best to enjoy these studies from week one, you may like to encourage new people to join the group along the way. This may be a way of introducing them to home groups in the parish.*

God and Noah and Creation

The account of Noah and the flood is known by many in society, but the implications of the covenantal aspects are not as well understood. When teaching R.E. at both the upper primary and secondary level, I found that students had little or no idea of the meaning of the word “covenant”. Ministering with adults, some understood the word “covenant” from the scriptural basis, but many thought it had something to do with the law and wills. Others understood the word to mean “agreement”. The word covenant as it is used in Scripture is much more powerful than just an “agreement”.

In Scripture, covenants are between God and humankind. The covenants are not between equal parties, because it is God who takes the initiative and sets the standards. Humans respond to the covenants by living into them. The real joy for us is that we receive the blessings of the covenant. We are the beneficiaries.

In this first covenant recorded in Scripture, we find God clearly taking the initiative. In verse 9 we read, “As for me, I am establishing my covenant with you (in this case Noah and his sons) and your descendants after you.” God goes on to include the animal and bird life and then God concludes by saying that never again will all flesh be cut off by flood (verse 11).

God promised a sign, a rainbow, which reminds us that the earth and animals will never be destroyed by flood. Each time I see a rainbow I

am reminded of an R.E. teacher who used to say that a “rainbow is God speaking to us”. Now, when I see a rainbow, I am deeply humbled and reminded that our God is a God of covenant who keeps His promises. A part of my unease is that I know I do not keep God’s covenant as faithfully as I should or would like to be able to do.

The prayer for the first Sunday in Lent, Year B, is based on this first covenant of Scripture. We pray using the words, “as the forty days of the great flood swept away the world’s corruption and watered new beginnings of righteousness and life: grant to us, who are washed clean and born again in the saving waters of baptism ...”

Baptism is a sacrament and is covenantal in nature. There are four promises. They are -

- I turn to Christ,
- I repent of my sin,
- I reject selfish living and all that is false and unjust and I renounce evil.

These promises are made on behalf of an infant or child, or by adult candidates themselves. [Several denominations baptise infants because of the faith of the parents and godparents/sponsors.]

The godparents or sponsors promise “to strive to be faithful to their baptismal vows, so that, by word and example, they may help the child to lead a Godly and Christian life. (Godparent card Diocese of North Queensland)

In Confirmation the same four

promises are made.

As Christians we are called to live into these promises, so that we live a life of righteousness. In baptism we are reminded that our sins are washed away. God is granting us a new beginning; a new start.

Baptism is also about new life in Christ. This new life has to be lived out. In the Anglican Baptism service, after the four promises the clergyperson asks, “Will you by God’s grace, strive to live as a disciple of Christ, loving God with your whole heart, and your neighbour as yourself, until your life’s end?” (p. 75 APBA)

Note the order; we are to love God first with our whole being and then we are able to love our neighbour in Christ’s name.

This question is fascinating in that it has a time clause; “until your life’s end”. For the Christian, living into God’s covenant and the baptismal promises is lifelong. There is no annual or long service leave for the Christian. As some put it today, being a Christian is a 24/7 way of life.

While God is always faithful, covenants need to be fulfilled and lived into; this takes time, commitment and effort on our part. We use our free will to respond to God and live into the covenant. When we do not honour the covenant and act contrary to the will of God, as was the case in the days of Noah, we are to repent of our sins to restore our relationship with God.

The second baptismal promise is, “I repent of my sins” (p. 75 APBA). Sin is any thought word or deed that separates us from God. As a result we have to restore our relationship with God. This requires repentance.

Repentance has three aspects; we say sorry to God, we say sorry to those whom we have wronged and we seek God’s strength to overcome that weakness in our lives knowing that our God is a forgiving God. God does not reject us; just as God told Noah and his descendants that he would never again destroy the earth by flood.

While God initiates each covenant, God also enables us to live into each covenant. Covenants are like rudders as on the front cover of this booklet. They guide us through the waters of life, whether calm or stormy and anything in between, as we journey with our Lord in faith seeking to make the world the place God intended, knowing that there will never be another flood.

Interesting Point -

The month of January in Queensland was one of disastrous floods, with the loss of human life; loss of businesses and property; in fact whole communities were destroyed.

Some of the flood waters came quickly like a mighty wall. Communities had little or no warning. Other flood waters



took ages to come and when they did they stayed for an extended period of time. Communities were on alert for up to a week or more. Then Cyclone Yasi arrived, bringing havoc, damage and further flooding in some places.

Sadly, human lives were lost. Some homes and property have been destroyed, while others have been badly damaged. While many dwellings have been repaired or replaced, there are many more still waiting for tradespeople to repair or rebuild.

At the time of writing, in Queensland, we are being made aware that another wet season will soon be upon us and there is the possibility of six cyclones this season. Be ready is the mantra, and “Are you prepared?” is the question on the lips of people and on advertising billboards.

The rainbow reminds us of hope and the future. As I drive around a part of this State, I am struck by the hopefulness, the desire to move forward and the care of people or care for others.

In the baptism service the question is asked of the godparents or adult: will you love God and our neighbour? Over the past summer, people sought to love their neighbour in ways that many did not dream was possible. Out of these tragedies people cared for others in ways that reminded us about how we should care for each other at all times, not just when disaster strikes.

Questions:

- Matthew 7:12a is what we call the Golden Rule, “In everything do to others as you would have them do to you”. In your opinion is the Golden Rule a lived reality today? Please share your thoughts as we continue to seek to live in a covenant relationship with God.
- It has been said that many today suffer from “compassion fatigue”, that is, the demand to care exceeds the capacity of people to be able to care and give at the same rate. In what ways can we address this reality?



Introduction and Welcome.

Group members are invited to share one or more of the following:

- Introduce themselves to each other.
- Share which worship service you generally attend and the blessings you receive.
- Share whether you have or have had a pet and joys and challenges a pet brings to life.
- Share a flood experience, or your thoughts about the terrible flooding in Queensland at the start of 2011, and your insights.

Then invite each person to describe briefly their expectations of this Lenten Study.

Conclude this section with some housekeeping matters:

- Establish if any member has any dietary requirements.
- Who will bring supper or morning tea at each session.
- Clarify when we are meeting and where.
- On page seven complete the table of who is attending the group and exchange telephone numbers if people are happy to do so.



Opening Prayer. (Say Together)

God of the new and eternal covenant,
as the forty days of the great flood swept away the world's corruption
and watered new beginnings of righteousness and life:
grant to us, who are washed clean and born again
in the saving flood of baptism, the wellspring of your grace,
that your gift of new life may flourish once again;
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy
Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



Getting Started

(Select from the following to get your group started)

- Share with the group a time when you were moved by seeing a rainbow.
- Share with the group any boating or water experiences that you have enjoyed that moved you to better understand God's creation.
- Share (if you wish) one agreement or covenant that has been very important in your life.
- Share your insights and thoughts about a recent baptism service.



Reading. Genesis 9: 8-17

Read aloud the whole passage.



Questions for reflection and discussion

(The leader makes a selection)

1. In Scripture, God initiates the covenant; we enjoy the blessings. What are some the blessings you have enjoyed because God has promised not to destroy the earth and the animal and bird life?
2. What do you think or feel when you see a rainbow? Some have had deeply spiritual experiences when seeing a rainbow. Has this been the case for you?
3. Christians are called to be good stewards of God's earth and its resources. What can the Church, your parish, and/or you do to be more effective stewards of God's earth and its resources?
4. On the radio recently, the person being interviewed said, "The Church focuses on love at the expense of sin and repentance." What is your response to this statement and why?
5. What does your baptism and confirmation mean to you now? In what ways do you see it as covenantal in nature?
6. God has blessed each of us with free will. In what ways can we serve God and our neighbour more effectively knowing we are blessed with free will?
7. God does not reject us. There are many in society who are rejected (because of where they have found themselves in life; refugees, etc.) As Christians, what can we do to show the love and grace of Christ to those who are rejected?
8. In the prayer for this week we pray, "that your gift of new life may flourish once again;"
In what ways can this be a reality for us as individuals and as a Parish/Church this Lent?



Let's Recap

Who is responsible for refreshments and when and where will you meet next time.

It has been my experience, that as you reflect on the previous session during the next week, new insights and thoughts come to mind. I invite you to record your insights, questions or comments and spend a few minutes at the start of the next session sharing the collective wisdom.

NOTE: If you have a few minutes to spare, check out the material on page 10. Alternatively you could choose to use this material instead of some of the questions in this study.



Closing prayers (Share together)

God of the new and eternal covenant,
as the forty days of the great flood swept away the world's corruption
and watered new beginnings of righteousness and life:
grant to us, who are washed clean and born again
in the saving flood of baptism, the wellspring of your grace,
that your gift of new life may flourish once again;
through Jesus Christ our Redeemer,
who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit,
one God, for ever and ever. Amen.



Refreshments and Fellowship.



Getting ready for next week:

Reading and preparation for next week is Genesis 17:1-7 & 15-16.
However, I would encourage you to read the whole of chapter 17.



"The man without a purpose is like a ship without a rudder - a nothing, a no man. Have a purpose in life, and, having it, throw such strength of mind and muscle into your work as God has given you."

Thomas Carlyle

Other Books available

1. Wood to the Weave

A very popular study using the symbols of The Passion.

The Rev'd Richard Stamp

2. Prayer - Music to God's Ears

Communication with God, and a practical prayer life.

The Rev'd Llewellyn Jones

3. Nurtured to be Free

Considers the essentials for the task of Evangelism.

Bishop Andrew Curnow

4. Good News is still Catchy

A practical look at the task of telling the good news in uncomplicated jargon.

The Rev'd Max Bowers

5. Lent with Luke

Based on the gospel of Luke (Yr C)

The Rev'd Brian Haig

6. A Fresh Start

“A Fresh Start” gives us this opportunity of going back to the basics - *Canon Frank Watts*

7,8,9. Being Christian ...

- in the 21st Century
- in the Secular World
- in the Church

The “Curnow Trilogy” is written by Bishop Andrew Curnow. The titles of the three books speak for themselves. Each week deals with the difficulties of being Christian in this world we live in.

10. Lent Re-Visited - Year B

This allows us to revisit, re-focus and redirect our Christian lives.

Bishop Bill Ray

11. Loving God and each other

The title says it all - Written by *Bishop Philip Huggins*

12. Staying on Track

A study to aid us in our Christian Journey. Based on Year 'B' OT & NT readings - *Bishop Bill Ray*

13. Anglican Today

A look at what it means to be an Anglican. *Bishop Curnow*

14. Easter Journey

Based on year 'A' Lent readings *Bishop Bill Ray*

15. Earth-ing my Faith

Based on year 'B' Lent readings *The Rev'd Ron Browning*

16. Spendthrift Lover

Based on year 'C' Lent readings
The endless generosity of God
Bishop John Parkes

17. Set Free by God's Grace

Based on year 'A' Lent readings
Deals with the Grace of God
Bishop John McIntyre

The following books are out of print

1. My Journey

2. Ministry begins with Me

3. Lord, Tune me

Check out our web site for sample studies of each book

www.grassroots.com.au



If your group purchased 10 or more copies of “Faith Rudder”, then you will have the password to obtain additional material on our web site.

MATERIAL INCLUDED

- *Suggestions for additional study and ideas for Holy week*
- *Kid’s Church talks and activities based on the readings*
 - *Sermon outlines*
 - *Newsletter inserts*
 - *Additional reading suggestions*

<http://www.grassroots.com.au>



Assisting parishes develop and maintain web sites

www.grassroots.com.au/WebPagesHosting.html



Parish Seminars and Consultancies

- Outreach ideas where the community see the church as relevant
 - Importance of welcoming skills
 - Attracting newcomers and keeping them
- Worship that does not lose the traditional relevance of the church?
 - Encouraging and nurturing families in church?

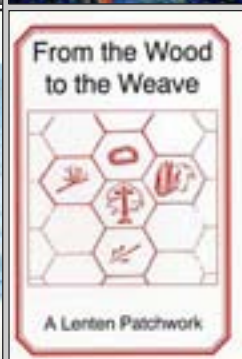
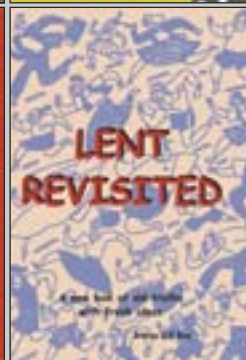
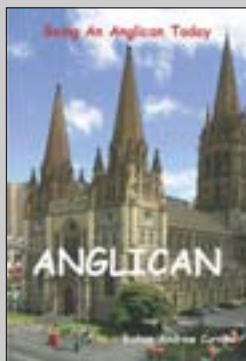
www.grassroots.com.au/Seminars/seminars.htm



Planning a Parish Tour

We are now offering to arrange a parish tour to one of the Holy Sites, Mission areas or simply a location that parishioners are keen to visit. It is a great bonding experience. Check this out at

www.anglicantours.com.au



Additional Titles