

**Presbytery of North East Victoria
Chairperson's letter of encouragement, July 2025**

Hello friends,

We are not long past the shortest day, a milestone that seems to come around faster with every passing year. It conjures thoughts of warm fires with their cosy glow and their sense of timeless comfort - a thought that came crashing down around me when I remembered that fires were something I had given up – a tiny token gesture to the health of the planet - what it stirred though were thoughts about letting go and giving up. More and more, I am convinced that the spiritual life is all about things we have let go and given up. More and more I am convinced that the spiritual life grows and deepens in all our tiny, daily, seemingly insignificant acts of giving up and letting go.

I have a particular love of the story of the last days of the prophet Elijah. Elijah and Elisha, his successor, are travelling together, and time and again, Elijah tries to send Elisha away. In think he is trying to spare Elisha and himself the grief of final parting. It is an act of love. People keep coming and telling Elisha, "Don't you know? Don't you know what is happening? Don't you know that today is the day that Elijah will leave us? Elisha, in what I imagine is the quietest of voices says, "Yes, I know, but let's not speak of it," and they travel on together, letting go of each other, little by little, until the moment is right. How many times have I seen people let go of life in this way and every time a blessing, a way deeper into the heart of God. As parents. how many times do we let go and give up for our children so that they will grow, or our friends? Letting go and giving up is what Jesus does as he turns and heads towards Jerusalem. It is what God does in making space for all of creation. It is what we do for one another as we make community that grows out of the loving kindness of God.

Elijah did not have an easy life, and I have wondered before whether some of that struggle came from his own desire, his own nature to have people conform to his way of understanding, or was it simply a life at the Spirit's urging? I guess we will never know. We can only know for certain about ourselves and even here we are not always truthful. The trick seems to be to understand letting go and giving up, not as something that makes us less but to see it for what it is or what it can be - an act of love. CS Lewis once wrote that in every choice we make, we are turning the central part of us into either a heavenly or a hellish creature; either into a creature that is in harmony with God, with others and ourselves, or into one that is in a state of war with God, with those around us, even ourselves.

I have a great admiration for the writer of the creation story in Genesis. I don't know anyone who so clearly understood the human condition. The struggle is not so much between good and evil, that always seems to me to be a by-product of the pull of I, me and my - me at the centre, self-sufficient me, me in charge of me, me first, my way. I am sure you wonder, as do I from time to time, what brought us to the point we are at as a Christian community and as a broader community. It seems to the Genesis story writ large – I, me, my. This is always and ever how it has been - in peaks and troughs.

What do I think our task is right now? There is a clue in the Jesus story, the part of Luke's gospel we have just entered. Jesus sets his face to go towards Jerusalem and the cross, that awaited him, which even at this point in the story already seems a distinct possibility. It is a journey all about letting go and giving up. What is our task? Not to strive, but like Elisha with Elijah, to travel a little way with Jesus. In a very real sense to be on the letting go and giving up journey with him. When Elisha asked Elijah for a double portion of his spirit, he wasn't asking for more, he wasn't asking to be greater. Fully understanding the implications, he was saying: "Let me be as you are?" Friends, my encouragement to you today is to be on the journey with Jesus in a very real way, growing into him, letting go and giving not in the sense of something being torn from us, las loss - but as something offered up, choosing the smaller the lesser, practicing faithfulness in small things and knowing the joy of it.

Gereldine