

Presbytery of North Easy Victoria
Chairperson's letter of Encouragement, December 2025

Dear fellow travellers,

A few days ago, an old friend died and that set me to thinking. Strangely, not long ago, I shared with you the words of the old song reproduced in the panel opposite. For many years these words were on a banner that hung in the Moss Vale Methodist Church Hall. For me they summed up not only my friends' life, but the life in Christ that had been shared in that place. Fellowship in Christ; faithfulness; speaking our truth; righting wrongs where we could; sharing what we had and who we were, supporting one another through thick and thin, and above all singing out our thankfulness to God.

As I spoke at my friend's funeral, I recalled that these words reflected what I had learned in that place Sunday by Sunday and seen lived out, Monday to Saturday. I recalled that we had not always got it right, that we had had our fallings out, that people, whose values differed, had come and gone, but that out of the discord we experienced, we had returned always to: fellowship in Christ; faith; truth, the righting of wrongs, the sharing of life and love and the praise of God. It was the constant, the melody of our lives that held us. Although they are very old, I think that these words are words for the moment.

We human beings have always been good at "othering." If we disagree for any reason, if we, or something or someone we value is threatened or feels threatened, if someone fails to live up to our expectations, the circle closes and that person becomes "other" than us. Sometimes suddenly, sometimes out of long-term prejudice, a person, or a group of people, or maybe a whole country is deemed "other" than us. Once "othered" there is always something "wrong" with her, or him, or them and there seems nothing that she, or he, or they can do to change that view. Increasingly there is nothing that they can do that seems "right". Often what "others" is something deemed different about a person - their abilities, their sexuality, colour, religion, place of origin and so on. Then comes Jesus. Love! Seek good for your enemies! Do good even to those who persecute you! Forgive, not just once but seventy times seven – for long as it takes – until the "othering" goes away.

We have not long listened to the story of the Good Samaritan. The questions it poses are not: are we going to be kind or will we stop to help an injured stranger? The answer to these questions is easy. We have spent years being conditioned to help and we hope we would. The question Jesus asks is much deeper. It asks a change of us - a fundamental change of heart – one that turns us more fully toward God. Will we help somebody, will we do good to somebody, will we support somebody who has acted with prejudice towards us? Will we act with loving kindness toward someone with whom we fundamentally disagree? Will we act with grace towards someone who has hurt us or someone we love or something we value? Will we do the same for someone who has failed to live up to our expectations or desires, or plans? Will we go to the aid of that person? Will we build them up? Will we hold them close in the bonds of love? Harder, don't you think? I know my constant struggle, but I fall continually to the fact that we worship a God who is life giving – who, by the sharing of self, lifts us up, enlivens us, gives us an expansive view of the world and invites us to do and to be the same. Could there be any greater friendship?

The funeral of my friend was led by a minister who in a long and impassioned sermon encouraged people to imagine heaven. It occurred to me that I didn't have to imagine. I have seen heaven in all those little moments of grace that we extend to one another. I have seen heaven in all the undeserved moments of loving kindness, extended to us at our most unlovely, done simply because this is what God has done for us. Similarly, I have seen and experienced and known the alternative and I know which is heaven – the kingdom of God come near.

**Lo here is fellowshippe.
One faith to hold,
One troth to speak,
One wrong to wreak.
One loving cup to sip,
And to dip
in one dish faithfulish.
As lambkins of one fold
Either for other,
To suffer all things.
One song to sing
In sweet accord
And maken melodie -
Lo here is fellowshippe.**

In deepest gratitude

Gereldine