

**Presbytery of North East Victoria**  
**Chairperson's letter of Encouragement, February 2026**

I am sitting in my little study on what promises to be one of the hottest days of the year and the temperature is rising. It has been a stressful summer so far, and it is a long way from finished. There have been fires, with the potential for more, and so we sit with those who have suffered loss and with those who have endured the threat of fire. In the weeks and months ahead, your Presbytery will be looking at ways to address the long-term impact on people who call themselves Uniting and the communities of which they are a part. As we have thought about what we can do, it has been interesting to try to come to terms with the fact that we can't do as much as we used. We want to rush to help, but at many levels, we are not able to do what we have done in the past. For those of us who have grown older, this is a familiar part of coming to terms with the process of aging. Often it seems the spirit is willing, far longer than the body is able. None the less we know that there are still things we can do in response to people affected by fires, and in life more generally, even if we are smaller in number, and older, and our resources are fewer. Learning how to live while letting go seems part of the getting of wisdom. Let me hasten to add that the getting of wisdom is not reserved to the very old. We have just had longer to make our mistakes and hopefully to learn by them.

Friends, Lent will soon be upon us. It is a season of reflection. A time to think about Jesus' death and resurrection. In this Lenten season I sense a movement of the Spirit, and I want to offer you something to think about. For a very long time we have focused on Jesus' death as a sacrifice or a substitution. Jesus standing in our place to pay for our sin, which with a capital "S" is a word that represents our separation from God. For some of us this has a great deal of meaning. It has freed and sustained. For others it has been a stumbling block. This is particularly so for the generations now not represented in most churches. So, with great respect for those to whom this way of thinking is important I want to say that it is not the only way that Christians have ever thought about Jesus' death and the meaning of resurrection.

In his life, Jesus talked most about the coming near of the Kingdom of God, or as Matthew frames it, the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus says that this reign is life giving for everyone, but most especially for those whose lives have been made less by the kingdoms of this world. He says it, and he embodies it in how he treats people and in how he resists the powers that make lives less or harder – that rob people of dignity.

In the past, one of the ways that people have thought about Jesus' death and resurrection is as the triumph of the reign of God embodied, as it is, in Jesus. I see this in a seemingly tucked away snippet within the larger story. After Jesus' death, his disciples are hiding behind locked doors in fear of their lives and Jesus comes to them. Let me be a momentary Thomas. I don't know how Jesus came to them, but I don't think it matters, in the end, because come to them he did, and their lives changed forever. Fearful people, probably still fearful, acted towards each other with loving kindness. They gave life to one another. They spoke up. They made a place. They spent their lives in the service of the reign of God. Some quite literally gave up their lives in faithfulness, as Jesus did. I don't know how Jesus came to those first disciples, but I do know that in the power of the Spirit he comes to us. I do know that the first task of disciples is to be as God is, to be life-giving, to lift-up, to encourage, to form a new community in which, as the hymn writer Shirley Murray said, there is a place for everyone born. This is our check list. Is what I am doing life-giving, in this situation one in which I am to speak up, to resist power that exploits. Am I to serve because this is what Jesus did.

Jesus came to those first disciples, small in number and lacking in power as they were, and they were renewed and energised and the Kingdom of God took new form, with new energy. It is the same with us because Jesus comes. Ours is a living faith, honouring a God who lives. It evolves, emphasis in thinking shifts according to the need of the day. Ideas always shift and change, but we have the capacity to hold them in tension, to sift out what we need to hold on to and what we can let go to make way for what God is doing in fresh ways. There is wisdom in this.

Gereldine