

**Presbytery of North East Victoria**  
**Chairperson's letter of encouragement – Easter 2026**

Hello friends,

It is Holy Week, and I have been sitting in my little study thinking about the Easter story and all the while, playing in the background, has been what is happening in the world. I have been trying to reconcile these two things in a way that is not just theoretical, asking how does my faith guide and support me in a world that is as it is? How do I live? How do I make decisions? How do I act toward others in ways that are responsive to what is going on around me and yet true to the teaching, to the life and witness of Jesus?

For me, the Easter story has always been about sacrificial love. Though I am sure that it is meaningful and appropriate and needful for others, I have never been able to wholeheartedly embrace the idea that Jesus went to his death as a sacrifice or a payment that God required. For me, it raises too many difficult questions about the nature of God. I understand sacrificial love. I understand the giving of oneself.

As I have been reflecting on the Easter story, as ever, my heart is tugged not to the cross or to the tomb though I see and celebrate the ravaged beauty of both. My heart goes always to the Garden of Gethsemane, to the Mount of Olives, where Jesus, all alone, struggles deep in his spirit. *Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me, yet not my will but yours be done.* Often in our reading of the Easter story, we pass over this incident quickly, robbing it of its anguish, of the sweat that falls like life's blood. In our flight to the cross we rob this moment of its significance and its power. However we understand Jesus, whether it be the lamb to the sacrifice, or the political martyr, or the one so full of God, as to show us what God is like - however we understand him, something significant is happening here and for me this is the decisive moment.

Jesus kneels, the weight of the cup of suffering upon him. He struggles, as we struggle, sweat falling like great drops of blood, so deep is his anguish. All the forces of chaos have reared up and are hanging over him like a huge wave, at the peak of its power...waiting. Defenceless, and alone, Jesus prays: *Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me.* Half a sentence, then a comma, an indrawn breath, the whole creation waiting on that breath. Then it comes: *yet, not my will, but yours be done.* In this decisive moment the battle is won. Humanity is returned to a proper relationship with God. *Not my will, but yours* and we can breathe again.

There are many interpretations of the meaning of Jesus' death. They come and they go, they change over time, often to address the need of the time. If you hold a different view to me of the meaning of Jesus death, I am not going to argue. They can sit alongside one another. No need for winners and losers, no need to assert ourselves over others for an assurance of who we are. For me, the meaning of Jesus death will always be that he chose to die rather than deny the love that is life giving. Love that helps each one of us know our value. Love that confers dignity. Love that raises us. Love that lifts us up.

Let me encourage all of us to put this to the test. Focus on a person, or a group of people with whom you disagree, a person or group that annoys you, that make you angry, that disappoints, that does not meet your standards or behaves differently. Consider what you could do to lift-up that person or that group of people? How could you offer respect, recognise worth, acknowledge innate dignity, and do this consistently over time. In the doing, what would change? Who do you think would change? Who would become more Christ-like?

We are a resurrection people. In lock-step, our wills aligned with that of God, our aim is a bigger, better more expansive life for everyone. We see that life growing out of a deep relationship with the sacred, with the holy that we call God. For me, it will always be that Jesus died rather than deny the truth and the possibilities of sacrificial love. Because of Jesus, we are gifted a raised-up, lifted-up, stand-up-straight life, that comes to us directly from the heart of God in Christ. And our response? To live this raised-up, lifted up, stand-up straight life. Sometimes we do this better than at other times but in all our attempts, in all our acts of sacrificial love, we are drawn more and more into the Christ, the resurrected one, who leads us to the place of repose, to the green pasture and still water that is the heart of God.

In this Easter season may each will rest in the will of God. May we love what God loves. May we find beautiful all that God finds beautiful – even ourselves. In this and every season, the grace of the garden, the grace of the cross, the grace of the empty tomb is ours. This is my joy.

Gereldine