



Renewal

GOD'S STORY, OUR STORY

LENT AT HOME 2025



The Uniting Church in Australia
QUEENSLAND SYNOD

Renewal

GOD'S STORY, OUR STORY

Lent at Home

Join us for Lent 2025 as we reflect on God's ongoing story of renewal for the whole of creation, and how our story weaves and intertwines with God's story. Over seven weeks, we will journey with people from past generations and hear stories of how God renewed their lives through transforming encounters, forgiveness, reconciliation, and faithfulness. As we hear and reflect on the stories of others, we will also reflect on how God is renewing our lives, and our Church, and what God is calling us to do in the renewal process.

In everyday life, the word RENEWAL can be cause for dread – an insurance renewal will cost a lot of money, a passport or license renewal could mean lots of paperwork or time spent waiting in a line, and a rental renewal may bring a rental rise.

But the word RENEWAL can also bring a sense of hope, a sense of excitement, and a sense of thankfulness especially when things are being changed and improved. Check out these definitions:

"A process in which something improves or is improved after being in a bad condition" Cambridge Dictionary

"Renewal of something lost, dead, or destroyed is the process of it growing again or being replaced." Collins Dictionary

"1. To make like new: restore to freshness, vigour, or perfection. 2. To make new spiritually. Merriam-Webster

This guide has many activities that you can engage with over the next 7 weeks. You can:



Read and think about the theme of week and how it applies to renewal,



Read the Bible and reflect on what it is saying,



Pray



Bake food



Make craft



Colour-in



Watch videos and listen to songs

This Lent, we encourage you to take the time to reflect on where you have seen God's renewal in your life, and in the Church. What has been improved or restored? Where have you seen growth and freshness? Where have you seen God at work? As you look to the future, what areas of your life, or the Church, still need God's renewal? Let's share our stories, encourage and uplift each other, seek God, and together be part of God's renewal process here on Earth.

An illustration at the top of the page shows several people in a garden. A woman in a dark green apron is holding a child, and another person is standing nearby. The scene is filled with green foliage and purple flowers.

Assurance

Lent One

God's story is one of forgiveness, hope, and faithfulness. Throughout the Bible, we constantly hear assurances that God is present, that God is at work, that God has a plan, and that God loves all people, despite our failings.

What about our story? As we consider what renewal means for our Church, and our lives, let's start by focussing on God's assurances to us. What has God already done in our lives, and where is God leading us?



FOCUS

Look up the meaning of the word 'assurance'.

When has someone assured you about something?

When have you assured someone or a group of people?

What is something that happened in your past that gives you assurance for the future?



MAKE AND BAKE

In the Deuteronomy reading we read about the exiled Israelites looking forward to the promised land flowing with milk and honey. As you reflect on the Israelite's story, try making some recipes with Milk and Honey.



INGREDIENTS

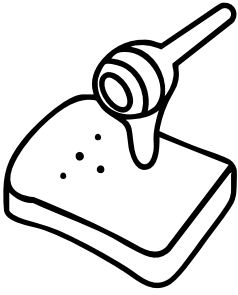
- 1 cup skim milk
- 1/2 tablespoon honey
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1/2 teaspoon cinnamon

HOT VANILLA HONEY MILK

METHOD

1. Put honey, vanilla extract and cinnamon in the bottom of a mug. Set aside.
2. In a separate mug, warm up milk for 2 minutes, or until hot, in microwave.
3. Pour hot milk over honey and spices, stir until dissolved. Taste to make sure it is sweet enough, if not add in more honey.
4. Microwave for one more minute, or until desired temperature is reached.

This recipe comes from: <https://www.food.com/recipe/hot-vanilla-honey-milk-376362> ¹



INGREDIENTS

- 4 slices bread
- 1 cup milk
- 2 eggs
- 2 tablespoon honey
- 2 tablespoon butter

HONEY MILK TOAST

METHOD

1. In a shallow dish, whisk together milk, eggs, and honey.
2. Dip each slice of bread into the milk mixture, allowing it to soak for a few seconds on each side.
3. Heat a non-stick skillet over medium heat and melt butter.
4. Cook the soaked bread slices in the skillet until golden brown on each side.
5. Serve the French toast hot with your choice of toppings.

This recipe comes from:

<https://www.slurrp.com/recipes/milk-and-honey-french-toas-1617687936> ²

As you eat/drink your honey and milk recipes you may like to chat about:

What new land you'd like to go to?

What you'd like to see your community overflowing with

What are some things you are looking forward to



CREATE

Make a basket and then put your thoughts, reflections, and prayers in it during the week.

<https://butfirstwecraft.com/2021/01/14/mini-basket-weaving/> ³



WATCH

[Twins try the candy temptation challenge](#) ⁴

These twins were assured that they could eat the candy when Mum returned. Do you think the twins will trust their Mum's assurance and wait to eat the candy? Guess what happens before you watch the video.



COLOUR

Colour in the basket and place it around the word renew

REFLECTION ONE



PRAY AND REFLECT

Become aware of your breathing. If you can, slow your breathing down and enjoy the feeling of breathing deeply.

As you breathe in, reflect on God's assurances. As you breathe out, thank God.

Breathe in: God's love and mercy endures forever

Breathe out: Thank you, God

Breathe in: God heals

Breathe Out: Thank you, God

Breathe in: God saves

Breathe out: Thank you, God

Breathe in: God hears and answers prayers

Breathe out: Thank you, God

Breathe in: God is a refuge and a fortress

Breathe out: Thank you, God

Breathe in: God is faithful

Breathe out: Thank you, God

Breathe in: God protects

Breathe out: Thank you, God

READ AND REFLECT



Deuteronomy 26:1-11



Psalms 91:1-2, 9-16



Romans 10:8b-13



Luke 4:1-13

LENT ONE: ASSURANCE

This week marks the beginning of Lent and the beginning of a new series – RENEWAL: God’s Story, Our Story. Over seven weeks, we’ll reflect on God’s ongoing story of renewal for the whole of creation, and how our story weaves and intertwines with God’s story.

During this series, we’ll journey with people from past generations and hear stories of how God renewed their lives through transforming encounters, forgiveness, reconciliation, and faithfulness. Along the way, we’ll reflect on how God is renewing our lives, and our Church, and what God is calling us to do in the renewal process.

To start the series, we are going to focus on the word ‘assurance’. I wonder what images, memories, thoughts, and feelings come to your mind when you hear the word ‘assurance’.

As I think about assurance, I remember a time when someone spoke with assurance to me.

Twelve years ago, something strange happened to my knee which caused it to stop bending and left me with extreme pain. One day, after four weeks of hospital care, a surgeon walked into my room and told me very matter-of-factly that I had something called Complex Regional Pain Syndrome and that my knee problems were basically ‘in my head’. The surgeon told me to go home and read about it and that there wasn’t anything more he could do to help me. I was shocked! How could this extreme pain be in my head? How could my un-bendable knee be all in my head? How could there be so little hope?

Thankfully, I didn’t have a chance to wallow in the news. As soon as the surgeon left, a physiotherapist who had been in

the room spoke to me with assurance. She said clearly, “Don’t go home and look up CRPS. You will only read about horror stories. You are young, you are fit, you are healthy, you are resilient. We can come up with a plan to support you so that you have positive outcomes.” She then gave me websites filled with proactive therapy ideas and good news stories, and she organised a plan of action for my recovery.

At that difficult time, I needed assurance. Assurance to know there was hope. Assurance to give me confidence to tackle the challenges ahead of me. Assurance to know that I wasn’t alone. And that assurance made a massive difference to my ‘knee’ journey and outcomes.

Throughout the Bible, and in this week’s lectionary readings, we hear many assurances that God is present, that God is at work, that God has a plan, and that God loves all people, despite our failings. These assurances can give us hope and confidence. These assurances let us know that we are not alone on the journey. And these assurances can motivate us as we think about what renewal means for our Church and our lives.

PS. Of course, I did look up CRPS and it was awful! Thankfully, the physiotherapist’s words of assurance meant more than the words on the CRPS webpages. And today, after lots of hard work, I’m climbing mountains, dancing, and living a pain-free life.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

Which of God’s assurances are most meaningful for you?

What is something that happened in your past that gives you assurance for the future?

As you think about the renewal of the Church, what assures you?

Transforming Encounters

Lent Two

God's story is one of encounters. God doesn't stay distant. God doesn't love people from afar. Throughout the Bible, we hear of many encounters between God and humans – life-changing moments that inspired confidence and helped people/groups transform and renew their behaviour and their lives.

What about our story? As we consider what renewal means for our Church, and our lives, let's reflect on the times when we've had transforming encounters with God, or with other people? As we focus on renewal, who, in your life, or in your neighbourhood, needs a transforming encounter with God today?



FOCUS

Look up the meaning of the word 'encounter'.

Who have you encountered in your life?

When have you encountered God?



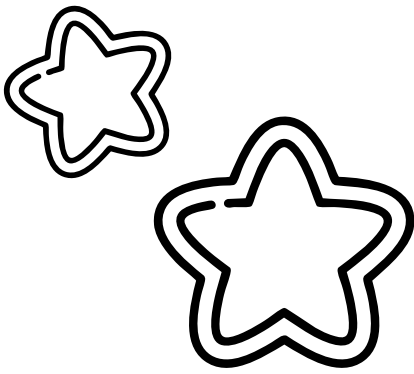
MAKE AND BAKE

In the Genesis reading, we read about Abram's transformative encounter with God. God said to Abram "Look at the sky and see if you can count the stars. That's how many descendants you will have."

At this time, Abram and his wife were very old and so the thought of having thousands of descendants, let alone one, may have been hard to believe. But sure enough God kept the promise and Abram (Abraham) and Sarai Sarah) had a baby boy called Isaac.

You might like to watch this short video about it: God's Promise for Abraham: Saddleback Kids

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zUhs-MWoTbg>⁵



STAR BISCUITS

INGREDIENTS

- 125 gram butter, chopped at room temperature
- 1/2 cup caster sugar
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract
- 1 egg
- 2 cup plain flour
- 1 teaspoon baking powder
- milk for glazing
- coloured sugar for decorating

METHOD

1. Preheat oven to 180°C (160°C fan-forced). Lightly grease two large baking trays. In a small bowl, using an electric mixer, beat butter, sugar and vanilla. Beat in egg until combined. Add sifted flour and baking powder. Place onto a floured board. Knead lightly until combined. Wrap in plastic and chill for 30 minutes.
2. Roll dough between 2 sheets of baking paper until 0.5cm thick. Using an 8cm star cutter, cut shapes from dough. Place onto prepared tray.
3. Brush with milk and sprinkle lightly with coloured sugar. Bake for 10-12 minutes, or until golden. Cool on trays.
4. Decorate with coloured sugar, if desired.

This recipe is from:

<https://www.womensweeklyfood.com.au/recipe/baking/star-biscuits-2975/> ⁶

As you eat the star biscuits you might like to chat about:

Times when you've encountered someone who changed your life

How you'd like to transform your community and/or Church

How you'd like to transform your life

What it means to encounter God



CREATE

Make stars to hang around the house.
You can find a design here:

Woven Star Decorations
<https://minimadthings.com/blogs/news/woven-star-decorations>⁷



WATCH

Watch this lovely video about an encounter: [\(Piper\) A Joy Story: Explainer Animated Videos](#)⁸

Dance along to:
[Totally Transformed: Jana Alayra](#)⁹

Listen to:
[Consider the Stars: Keith & Kristyn Getty](#)¹⁰



COLOUR

Colour in the stars page

REFLECTION ONE



PRAY AND REFLECT



STARRY NIGHT PRAYERS

Go outside at night and lie down on a picnic rug and look at the stars. As you watch, listen to what God might have to say to you.



PLAYDOUGH PRAYERS

Hold and squish some playdough and reflect on the times when you may have felt like a blob in desperate need of transformation. Who else, in their community, may feel this way now?

Then, make a shape that represents hope or transformation. What may God be saying to you, as you transform the playdough?

READ AND REFLECT



Isaiah 55:1-9



Psalms 63:1-8



1 Corinthians 10:1-13



Luke 13:1-9

LENT TWO: TRANSFORMING ENCOUNTERS

In 2003, my wife and I met Naomi* at a 'safe house' in the northern Thai city of Chiang Mai. The house was part of the first anti-human trafficking ministry set up in Thailand in 1989, called the New Life Centre.

At the centre, we were working as English teachers. During this work, we had a transforming encounter with Naomi, a courageous and faithful young follower of Jesus who challenged us deeply about the type of Christians we aspired to be.

Naomi's story was tragic. She was trafficked from her village in a remote part of Myanmar as a 14-year-old. She grew up in a Christian family and was an active member of her local church. An intelligent girl, she had completed all the schooling available to her in her village. But one day, a man came to her community and promised her work as a domestic helper in Thailand. Poor, and with few opportunities, her family agreed to allow her to go. But when she arrived, she was enslaved. For two years, she rarely left the room where she was held captive. Despite her situation, she told us she never gave up. She prayed each day that God would rescue her and use her to help the other girls, some of whom were only 10 years old.

She said she never believed God was not hearing her prayers.

Not long after her 16th birthday a man entered her room. But instead of wanting to harm her, he wanted to talk with her. He was an undercover officer with the Thai Government's anti-trafficking squad. He was the answer to Naomi's prayers. After several meetings a rescue operation was launched, and 20 girls were rescued. But as the social workers entered the room where Naomi had been held captive nothing could have prepared them

for what they found. Written in pen on the wall of her room were the words from Psalm 27:

*The Lord is my light and my salvation – whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life – of whom shall I be afraid?*

*When evil men advance against me to devour my flesh,
When my enemies and my foes attack me, they will stumble
and fall.*

*Though an army besiege me, my heart will not fear, though
war break out against me, even then I will be confident.*

Naomi told us she had memorised the psalm at Sunday School and as she endured the horror of human trafficking, it sustained her, even when she thought she couldn't go on.

This encounter impacted us greatly. We learnt that just because we are Christians, we are not immune from suffering. Her faithfulness, in the worst of situations, showed us that God listens to our prayers and rescues us from the evil in this world. In Jesus, there is always hope.

PS. Of course, I did look up CRPS and it was awful! Thankfully, the physiotherapist's words of assurance meant more than the words on the CRPS webpages. And today, after lots of hard work, I'm climbing mountains, dancing, and living a pain-free life.

**Not her real name.*

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

God often brings people into our lives that impact us deeply.
Can you think of a transforming encounter you've had? What was the impact of this encounter?

God also uses the Scriptures to create transforming encounters.
Can you identify a Bible verse that has been transformative in your life?

Missionary Amy Carmichael once said:
"One can give without loving, but one cannot love without giving".
Jesus' death on the cross is the ultimate expression of love.
How can we express transformative love in our own communities?



Seeking God

Lent Three

God's story is one of being present with humans. Throughout the Bible, we hear of people searching for, and drawing close to God, and seeking God's comfort, wisdom, and guidance. We also hear of people seeking God at times when they are desperate – desperate for God's mercy, forgiveness, and protection. Many generations before us have known, and shared their stories, of God being present when they draw close to God.

What about our story? As we consider what renewal means for our Church, and our lives, let's reflect on what it means to seek God in our everyday lives? As we seek God this Lent, what might God be saying to us?



FOCUS

Look up the meaning of the word 'seek'.

When have you sought after something?

When have you desperately tried to find/seek an item/object

What does it mean, for you, to seek God?

What have you learnt or discovered when you've had a time of seeking God?



MAKE AND BAKE

REFRESHING PUNCH

Both the Isaiah and Psalm readings have a theme of thirsting and seeking God. Try making this thirst-quenching drink.

INGREDIENTS

- 2 litres of Coles lemonade, cold
- 2 litres of tropical juice, cold
- 825g can of Coles fruit salad, cold
- 2 nectarines, sliced
- Ice, to fill

METHOD

1. Place all ingredients into glass dispenser
2. Fill dispenser with ice
3. Serve immediately

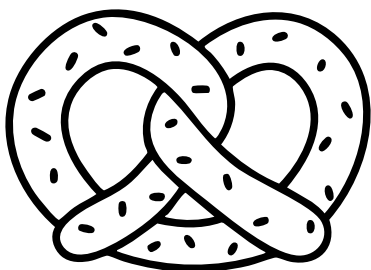
As you drink the punch read Psalm 63:1-8. You might like to chat about:

A time when you've been really thirsty or hungry

What you thirst/seek after

What it means for you to thirst/seek God

This recipe comes from: <https://theorganisedhousewife.com.au/recipes/coles-tropical-punch/> ¹¹



INGREDIENTS

- 1 ½ cups hot water
- 1 tablespoon sugar
- 1 tablespoon salt
- 1 package active dry yeast
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted
- 4 ½ cups plain flour
- 10 cups water
- 1 cup baking soda
- 1 egg, beaten and mixed with 1 tablespoon of water

WANT MORE FOOD IDEAS?



FUNNY FACE BISCUITS

[VIEW RECIPE HERE](#) ¹³

Remember to seek God as you eat these biscuits.

PRETZELS

Pretzels are historically associated with Lent, as their shape looks like arms folded in prayers.

Try making this pretzel recipe or buy some pretzels from the shop.

METHOD

1. Mix the water, sugar, salt, and yeast together in a large bowl. Let the mixture sit for five minutes, until the yeast starts to bloom (it should look like a layer of foam on the surface of the water).
2. Add in the butter and flour and mix until the dough is smooth like satin.
3. Cover the bowl and let it sit until the dough is doubled in size, about 1 hour.
4. Preheat your oven to 220 degrees and spray baking sheets with oil.
5. Boil water with baking soda in a large saucepan.
6. Divide the dough into eight pieces. Shape each piece of dough into a 24-inch rope and then twist it into pretzel shape.
7. Dip each pretzel in the boiling water for 30 seconds on each side before placing it on the sheet pan.
8. Brush the pretzels with egg wash and sprinkle them with salt.
9. Bake for 12-14 minutes.

As you eat your pretzels you might like to:

Pray for people who might need love and support at this time.

Brainstorm about how you could help people during Lent

This recipe comes from Faithforward:

<https://www.faithward.org/lent-pretzels-recipe-and-pretzel-prayer/>¹²



WATCH

[Watch this episode of Bluey: Hide and Seek](#)¹⁴

I wonder what distracts us from seeking God



GAME

Play a game of Hide and Seek. The good news is that God doesn't hide from us when we seek God!



CRAFT

Make a glue glitter sensory bottle

<https://capturingparenthood.com/blue-glitter-glue-sensory-bottle/>¹⁵



COLOUR

Colour in the water jug

READ AND REFLECT



Isaiah 55:1-9



Psalm 63:1-8



1 Corinthians 10:1-13



Luke 13:1-9

REFLECTION THREE



PRAY AND REFLECT



LISTEN AND SEEK

Listen to running water and spend time seeking God.

You might like to play this video:

[Quiet Water Sounds](#)¹⁶



WATER REFLECTION

Take a small dry sponge and think about the areas of your life, and your Church, that may be thirsty for God.

Soak the sponge in water and imagine God filling you, and the Church, up with life-giving water. As you squeeze out the water thank God

READ AND REFLECT



Isaiah 55:1-9



Psalms 63:1-8



1 Corinthians 10:1-13



Luke 13:1-9

LENT THREE: SEEKING GOD

I grew up in an American Christian tradition that didn't observe the season of Lent. Now, it's a period of the Church's calendar that does play a role in my Christian imagination, but the general feeling I have when it rolls around each year is mostly one of conflict.

I think there are a couple of reasons for this: First, Lent asks participation: will I or won't I engage intentionally with the traditional rituals of Lent (ash on my forehead, fasting, confession, etc.)? That's a question I find difficult to resolve. Secondly though, my uncertainty stems from the complicated nature of Christian existence, a point of emphasis for these days of preparation leading to Good Friday and Easter.

What is this complicated Christian existence? Well, it might be described in reference to the theme for this week, namely, Seeking God. On the one hand, we are encouraged in the Psalms to seek God. On the other hand, though, we are told in Romans chapter 3:10-11, for example, that "There is no one who is righteous, not even one; there is no one who has understanding; there is no one who seeks God." It can sometimes feel like we are encouraged to think about seeking God almost casually, as if we were playing a game of Hide and Seek. Only a little reflection, however, makes it clear that this isn't quite right; there are both similarities and differences. Part of our inability to find God in this way is simply that God is not an object in the same way that another player in the game of Hide and Seek is while in their hiding place.

Things are more complicated still, though. We can only seek to find the thing we are looking for, which is to say that we need to know the thing itself in order to set out to find it. In the case of seeking God then, we have the challenge of both knowing and not quite knowing who it is we seek. One more: in the case of God, we can become convinced that the idea of seeking God itself is something of a myth. If we are in Christ, we could

wonder, then isn't the God-shaped hole in all of us already filled or satisfied, leaving us with little to seek after? Isn't "seeking" God simply a creative way of talking about something already accomplished for us?

One of the gifts of Lent might be this tension-filled dynamic. This is a time in the Christian year to attend to the challenges of the Christian life, challenges brought about by our very human limitations - our sin, our distractions, and our exhaustion. With respect to the idea of seeking God, we are forced to wrestle with the fact that even though we want to settle down with God in a personal relationship, we must recognize that God is not simply to be found as is a player in Hide and Seek. St. Augustine in his Confessions, described God as requiring us to run after him as he runs just out of reach in front of us. This isn't, of course, because God doesn't want to be known by us or satisfy us in the way the Scriptures often describe, but because we are encouraged to embrace our incompleteness by leaning forward into the infinite grace and love of God.

It turns out that, in the light of the Lenten tensions I've wrestled with, words like, "Seek me and you will find me if you seek me with all your heart," (Jeremiah 29:13) are not so straightforward. There is no obvious or simple method that can be recommended for seeking God. It really isn't Hide and Seek. Instead, in the messy and complicated stuff of life, we might bring ourselves to the God who is always close by, opening ourselves to God's presence in all our very human frailties.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

What has your experience of Lent been like up to this point in your life?

Do you find Christian life to be mostly simple or sometimes complicated? Why?

How does the idea that tension could be a gift of Lent strike you?

In what ways are you currently seeking God? How do you know?

Forgiveness & Reconciliation

Lent Four

God's story is one of forgiveness and reconciliation. Throughout the Bible, we hear of many people/groups rejecting and ignoring God and God's ways. And yet, we also hear powerful stories of God forgiving and bringing reconciliation, with grace and mercy, and the new life that springs up afterwards.

What about our story? As we consider what renewal means for our Church, and our lives, let's reflect on our own shortcomings, and the times when we've experienced God's forgiveness and/or reconciliation. Let's also reflect on who we may need to seek reconciliation with before renewal can occur.



FOCUS

Look up the meanings of the words 'forgiveness' and 'reconciliation'.

How are the words similar? How are they different?

What do these words mean for you?

As you look around your community, and the world, who needs to be reconciled?



MAKE AND BAKE

YUM YUM BALLS

In the Joshua reading, the Lord said to Joshua, "Today I have rolled away from you the disgrace of Egypt." Make some Yum Yum Balls to represent the things that God has rolled away from our lives.

Ingredients

- 2 cups crushed plain biscuits
- 1 cup desiccated coconut
- 2 tablespoons CADBURY BOURNVILLE Cocoa
- 400g condensed milk
- 1 - 1 ½ cups desiccated coconut, extra, for rolling

Method

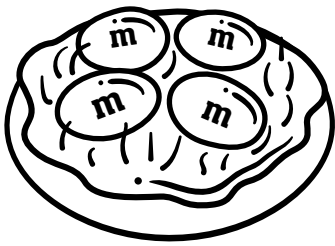
1. Mix all the ingredients together thoroughly.
2. Shape 2 teaspoon amounts into balls and roll in extra coconut.
3. Chill for 30 minutes. Store, refrigerated, in an airtight container until required.

As you eat your Yum Yum Balls you might like to think about:

The things that God has rolled away from your life.

The things that you'd like God to roll away from your life or from your community.

This recipe comes from: <https://www.food.com/recipe/yum-yum-balls-6397317>



INGREDIENTS

Sugar Cookies

- 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ cups plain flour
- 1 teaspoon baking soda
- $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon baking powder
- 1 cup butter, softened
- 1 $\frac{1}{2}$ cups white sugar
- 1 egg
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

Grass Icing

- 185g butter, softened
- 2 $\frac{1}{4}$ cups icing sugar mixture
- 2 tbsp milk
- Food colouring (optional)
- Decorations –
- small eggs or M&M's

NEW LIFE COOKIES

Make some New Life Cookies. The M&Ms represent what's been rolled away/forgiven in our lives. The grass represents the new life that can happen when we've been forgiven.

METHOD

Sugar Cookies

1. Preheat oven to 190 degrees C.
2. Stir flour, baking soda and baking powder together in a small bowl
3. Beat sugar and butter together in a large bowl with electric mixer until smooth
4. Beat in egg and vanilla
5. Gradually blend in flour mixture
6. Roll dough into walnut-sized balls and place 2 inches apart onto ungreased baking sheets
7. Bake for 8-10 minutes until edges are golden. Cool on baking sheets before removing to a wire rack to cool completely

Icing

Using an electric mixer, beat butter in a bowl until pale. Gradually add icing sugar mixture and milk, beating constantly until combined. Beat in food colouring, if using, until combined.

Decorate

Pipe green 'grass' icing on to cooled biscuits. Decorate with little eggs. Enjoy eating!

As you eat, you may like to chat about:

What new life you've had in your life

What new life you'd like in your life or in your community

What you think the new life that God gives is like

This recipe has been adapted from:

<https://www.recipegirl.com/easter-grass-sugar-cookies/>¹⁸

CREATE



GRASS HEAD

Make a grass head¹⁹ to represent the new things that God has in store for us.



BEFORE AND AFTER PICTURE:

Paint or draw a Before and After Picture. On one side shows what it is like to be removed from God, and one side shows what it is like to be reconciled with God.

WATCH



Dung Beetle Rolls Enormous Dung Ball with Difficulty²⁰

What burdens/rubbish/pain have we been rolling around with us? What would happen if God rolled those things away?



The Angry Bee: A Story about Forgiveness²¹

Is there anyone in your life who you need to forgive or seek forgiveness from?

What have you missed out on, in the past, because forgiveness hadn't occurred?

REFLECTION FOUR



PRAY AND REFLECT



PRAY AND WALK

Go for a walk in a garden or park and look out for signs of new life.

Talk to God about the areas of your life, or the Church, where you want to see new life.



DUNG BEETLE

Watch the Dung Beetle video (above).

Ask God for forgiveness for any 'dung' that you might be carrying around.

READ AND REFLECT



Joshua 5: 9-12



Psalm 32



2 Corinthians 5:16-21



Luke 15:1-3, 11b-32

LENT FOUR: FORGIVENESS & RECONCILIATION

I was a good kid growing up. I had heard the stories of Jesus and prided myself on being someone who looked out for the outcast, the forgotten, and who followed the rules. So, I'm pretty ashamed of this story.

In year 6 a new girl arrived at our school. She happened to have a big nose. For some reason everyone in my grade started to tease her. It probably wasn't everyone, but enough that somehow, I was drawn into this. I'm not sure why, but it seems that in that moment, I gave up good sense for a chance to be a part of the in-crowd, who were feeling big by making someone feel small.

I knew it was wrong, but it was just fun, wasn't it? It wasn't long before we heard that this girl wasn't coming back to school. We had made her life so miserable that she had to move to another school. I lived in Tenant Creek. A new school meant leaving town.

It suddenly hit me. I did that to her! I chased her from town. How would I like that to be done to me? I suddenly saw the hatred and venom in my heart, and it made me sick. I wanted to find this girl and say I was sorry. I wanted to hold her so she would know someone loved her. I was the good kid! I was the kid who knew enough about God to know that Jesus was the

friend of the outcast, not the cause of their outcast. I cried and wished and prayed I could turn back time. But she was gone.

The only thing I could do was plead for God's forgiveness, but I had a dilemma. How could God forgive me, when this girl deserved justice? This girl deserved to see someone squirm and suffer for all that she had gone through. If God forgave me, she would never see justice done.

That's when I realised, someone did suffer; Jesus. Jesus could forgive me, because he had suffered and squirmed and been called names for all the pain I had caused. Justice could be done and be seen to be done, with forgiveness also given.

This realisation undid me. My sins were real, but so was God's forgiveness. The Easter story wasn't simply a fairy tale from the past, but a story about my future.

"In Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting our trespasses against us." 2 Corinthians 5:19

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

Imagine being the young man in the story of the prodigal son, who walked away from his Dad, and then was welcomed back.
What feelings and thoughts are present as you imagine?

Have you ever felt terrible because of how you treated someone?
What did you do?

Has someone ever forgiven you for something, when they really didn't need to?
How did that make you feel?

As you look around your community, and the world, who needs to be reconciled?
What part might you play in bringing reconciliation?



Abundance

Lent Five

God's story is one of abundance. Throughout the Bible we constantly hear of God's abundant love and blessings undeservedly poured out on humans.

What about our story? As we consider what renewal means for our Church, and our lives, let's reflect on the times when we have been showered with God's abundance. What did this look or feel like? As we look to the future, who, in your life, or neighbourhood, is in desperate need of experiencing God's abundance? What role can you play in sharing God's abundance with them, or others?



FOCUS

Look up the meanings of the words 'abundance'.

What does abundance mean, or look like, to you?

When have you had an abundance of something?

When has someone given to you abundantly?

When have you, or your Church, given abundantly to someone?

When has God showered you with abundance?



MAKE AND BAKE DAISY COOKIES

Make an abundant amount and share with others!

Ingredients

- 225g plain flour
- 150g butter
- 75g icing sugar
- Smarties

Method

1. Preheat the oven to 190°C
2. Place all ingredients in a bowl and rub the butter into the dry ingredients to form a dough.
3. Once combined, roll 5 small portions into balls. Line a tray with baking paper and place the 5 balls in a circle to form a flower shape.
4. Gently push down with your finger and create the petal shape.
5. Place a smartie in the centre and place daisy cookies in the freezer for 30 minutes.
6. Place daisy cookies in oven and bake for 8-10 minutes.
7. Let cool before serving.

As you make the cookies, you might like to chat about:

How God has abundantly blessed you

How you can share God's abundance with others

This recipe comes from: <https://kidseatbyshanai.com/daisy-cookies/22>



CRAFT



MAKE PERFUME

Remember Mary's gift of abundance as you make perfume

[With children](#)²³

[With adults](#)²⁴



MAKE A GARDEN

Remember God's abundance to us as you [make a beautiful garden](#)²⁵



WATCH

[Watch the Bluey video: Facetalk](#)²⁶

What might you or your church be 'hogging'? How can you share God's abundance so that others may experience it and enjoy it?

[Watch The Goodness of God: The Crosby Family](#)²⁷

[Watch John 12:1-50: Lumo \(verses 1-8\)](#)²⁸



COLOUR

Colour in the flower



PRAY AND REFLECT



WATCH

Watch the song video:

[God of Abundance: Kat Mills Music](#)²⁹

Reflect on all the gifts that God has given you. Ask God how you can share those gifts with others



PRAY AND WALK

Go for a walk around your neighbourhood and thank God for the small things and big things that you notice. Stop and pray if you see any situations where God's abundant love may be needed.



READ AND REFLECT



Isaiah 55:1-9



Psalms 63:1-8



1 Corinthians 10:1-13



Luke 13:1-9

LENT FIVE: ABUNDANCE

When was the last time you did something for someone else without any expectations of getting something back in return? Have you ever received a gift and felt obligated to return the favour, or at least sent a thank-you note? Even the best-intentioned gifts can leave the other person with feelings of guilt.

On this Fifth Sunday of Lent, we read from the Gospel according to John and hear the story of Jesus sharing a meal with his good friends (Mary, Martha, and Lazarus) and his disciples. In this story John tells us how Jesus came to Bethany and stayed at the home of Lazarus. This was not that long after Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead. So, of course, Jesus's friends are delighted to host him for dinner. Can you imagine how awkward the dinner must have been? Certainly, they are all overjoyed to have Lazarus back, but we should remember that he had been in a tomb just a few days before. Now he's with them at dinner! This is crazy and almost beyond belief.

Mary is filled with gratitude to have her brother back. She is indebted and loves Jesus so much that she must express it in some crazy way. So, she takes some perfume that she has had stashed away that was the most valuable thing she owned. Without any explanation, she uses it all to anoint the feet of Jesus with her hair. John tells us that its value is equal to a year's worth of wages. Everyone knew it had to be good because the whole house was filled with the beautiful fragrance.

This is a story of abundance. It is a bewildering, extravagant and crazy act of love. This was no ordinary gesture. It was a heartfelt, sacrificial, profound declaration of love and a deep act of gratitude.

When it comes to love, how much is too much? Should we draw lines or place limits on love? Everything we know from scripture assures us that, for God, there can be no measure of how much God loves us. Jesus' sacrifice of himself, which is foretold in this story of Mary's anointing, is the ultimate expression of such exuberant and extravagant love.

Mary offered up to Jesus all that she had and did not hold back even though she was subjected to criticism about her thoughtless waste of something so valuable.

How often do we hold back, measuring our giving in terms of what it will cost us rather than pouring out our best in faith and gratitude? Do we give of ourselves to God without restraint, all that we have and all that we are?

Abundance is not meant to be hoarded but shared. Every act of giving, whether big or small, mirrors the love and generosity of all that God gave up for us in the giving of his son Jesus. The apostle Paul wrote "that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love" (Rom 8:38-39). God's desire for all of us is that we might know and experience his deep love for us, that we might be transformed and renewed in him.

As we take time out in prayer and reflection during this period of Lent and as we commence these 40 Days of Prayer in preparation for our 38th Synod Meeting it is my prayer that you will know, experience for yourself and be transformed by the extravagant love of God. May your life be renewed afresh by the Spirit and may our church experience reflect God's unlimited love for all people.

I am getting a sense that God's extravagant love might lead us to do something so unexpected, so out of the ordinary, that our friends, and yes even our neighbourhoods and community, will think we've gone crazy... crazy with love!

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

When was the last time you did something for someone else without any expectations of getting something back in return?

How do you think you would have reacted if you'd witnessed Mary's outpouring of abundance?

"Abundance is not meant to be hoarded but shared" When have you shared your abundance?
When might you have hoarded your abundance?

How have you experienced the extravagant love of God?
How might you share that love with others in your neighbourhood and community?

Readiness

Lent Six

God's story is one of being ready to act. Throughout the Bible we hear of God's readiness to forgive, comfort, guide, protect, and transform. We also hear many stories of people being ready to follow God's instructions and plans, and make changes, no matter what the cost.

What about our story? As we consider what renewal means for our Church, and our lives, let's reflect on our readiness – our readiness to follow God, our readiness for change, our readiness to praise God, our readiness to bring comfort and healing to others, our readiness to step out of our comfort zones. What might we have to change now to be ready for what God is going to do in the future?



FOCUS

Look up the meanings of the words 'readiness'.

How are you getting ready for Easter?

What is something you like getting ready for?

What is something you don't like getting ready for?

What does it mean to be ready for God?

What might you need to do to be ready for what God is wanting to do in your life, in your Church, in your community?



MAKE AND BAKE

PALM 'SUNDAE' DESSERT RECIPE

Remember and reflect on the Palm Sunday as you make these Palm 'Sundaes.

Place the ingredients in a 'sundae' cup or bowl. The suggested order is:

1. Ice Cream (any flavour): You can't have a sundae without it!

2. Crushed Cookies: The crushed cookies symbolize the rough and rocky road that Jesus travelled on to Jerusalem.

3. Spearmint Leaves or green lolly substitute (jelly beans): The spearmint leaves symbolise the palm branches that were waved and spread across the road during Jesus' arrival.

4. Whipped Cream: This is solely just for aesthetics. You can't have ice

cream without a little extra cream! Plus, it makes it so much easier to place Jesus, the donkey and the sprinkles.

5. Miniature Kit Kat: This represents the donkey that Jesus rode on.

6. Sour Patch Kid or Jelly Baby: This represents Jesus. You can use whatever candy you want for this, but I thought it would be perfect since it is sort-of-human shaped. Gummy bears might also work.

7. Sprinkles: This represents the joy and celebration of the crowd as the Messiah entered into Jerusalem.

As you eat your Sundaes you might chat about:

Who had to be ready in the story?

Did anything surprise you in the story?

What is your favourite part of the story?

What would you do today to get ready for Jesus?

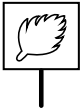
This recipe comes from: <https://www.southernmadesimple.com/palm-sundae-dessert/>³³



CRAFT



[Make palm fronds](#)³²



[Make a Palm Sunday Spinner](#)³³



[Make a Palm Sunday Playdough Mat](#)³⁴



GAME

Hold mini competitions during the week to see who can get ready first for different who can get ready - school, bed, dinner, park etc



WATCH

[Hosanna: Yancy & Little Praise Party](#)³⁵

[Luke 19:28-48:Lumo](#)³⁶

[Palm Sunday: God's Story](#)³⁷



COLOUR

Colour in the cloak

WANT MORE FOOD IDEAS?

DONKEY BISCUITS

[VIEW RECIPE HERE](#)³⁸



PRAY AND REFLECT

As you get ready for each day, ask God to help you be ready to love, to serve, to care, to follow God.

READ AND REFLECT



Psalm 118:1-2, 19-29



Luke 19:28-40

LENT SIX: READINESS

The question of readiness is present throughout our whole lives: it can be raised as we are (trying) to leave the house in the morning, before a presentation at work or school, or maybe it's the question that is asked before church on a Sunday.

When you hear the question "Are you ready?" are you the kind of person who will usually say: "Yes!" or "Not yet"?

Being ready can be about our Skills, our Supplies, and our Spirit.

We can be ready by having the right Skills.

If you're ready for the pool then you usually want to be able to swim.

If you're ready to present then you want to speak clearly.

If you're ready to write a reflection then you want to be able to proofread¹.

As the church, there are so many different skills that people have that contribute to the mission of God in and through the church.

We can be ready by having the right Supplies.

When I was in high school we had a camp every year and the motto was "there's no such thing as bad weather, just poor preparation." We had to make sure we had the right clothes, the right food, and the right equipment. We had to

ensure that our backpacks were lined with garbage bags so when it rained our stuff wouldn't get wet. We needed to be intentional about the kinds of things we brought with us and the things we left at home so that we reduced rubbish and weight.

We can be ready by having the right Spirit.

If we think about "spirit" as being similar to "attitude" then the wrong spirit would be like having a member of your team decide to not care about the team's goals and do their own thing instead. As the church, having the right spirit is knowing that who we are and what we do are in line with God's plan and purpose. Having the right spirit can help us on the journey of growing and learning the right skills, and making sure we have the right supplies.

We can also think about "spirit" as being the Holy Spirit which is the way God joins with us as we follow.

This week's readings include the readiness to worship God, and serve God. The people are ready to welcome Jesus, praise God, and respond to the love of God which endures forever. The disciples are ready to serve Jesus: even when what they are being asked to do is a little unusual.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

What kinds of activities do you enjoy getting ready for?

What could be the skills needed for renewal in the church?

What might be the supplies we need for renewal in the church and what might God be saying that we need to "leave out of the backpack"?

What helps you have the right spirit/attitude?

When have you been aware of the Holy Spirit being at work?

¹ Yes this is intentional. I hope it makes someone giggle. I apologise to those for whom this causes distress.



Confidence During Dark Times

Good Friday - April 18

God's story is one of light, hope, and confidence during dark times. Throughout the Bible, we hear of people who remain confident in God even when everything around them seems to be falling apart. These people know that God will forgive, restore, protect, and guide them even if they feel forsaken (or like a worm as the Psalmist David did!).

What about our story? As we consider what renewal means for our Church, and our lives, let's reflect on the dark times of our lives when there seemed to be no hope. How did you experience confidence or hope in God? As we look to the future, what gives you confidence and how might you share your confidence with others



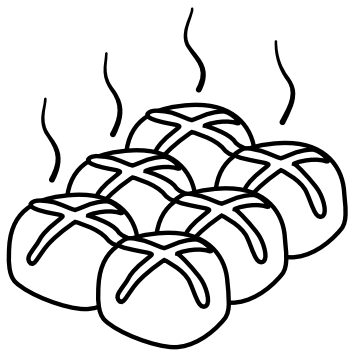
FOCUS

Look up the meanings of the words 'confidence'.

When have you felt full of confidence?

Who or what gives you confidence during dark times?

As you look to the future, what gives you confidence?



HOT CROSS BUNS RECIPE

Try making this Hot Cross Bun recipe or buy some from the shops.

METHOD

1. Combine flour, yeast, sugar, mixed spice, salt and currants in a large bowl. Melt butter in a small saucepan over medium heat. Add milk. Heat for 1 minute, or until lukewarm. Add warm milk mixture and eggs to currant mixture. Use a flat-bladed knife to mix until dough almost comes together. Use clean hands to finish mixing to form a soft dough.
2. Turn dough out onto a floured surface. Knead for 10 minutes, or until dough is smooth. Place into a lightly oiled bowl. Cover with plastic wrap. Set aside in a warm, draught-free place for 1 to 1 1/2 hours, or until dough doubles in size.
3. Line a large baking tray with non-stick baking paper. Punch dough down to its original size. Knead for 30 seconds on a lightly floured surface until smooth. Divide into 12 even portions. Shape each portion into a ball. Place balls onto lined tray, about 1cm apart. Cover with plastic wrap. Set aside in a warm, draught-free place for 30 minutes, or until buns double in size. Preheat oven to 190°C or 170°C fan-force.
4. Make flour paste: Mix flour and water together in a small bowl until smooth, adding a little more water if paste is too thick. Spoon into a small snap-lock bag. Snip off 1 corner of bag. Pipe flour paste over tops of buns to form crosses. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, or until buns are cooked through.
5. Make glaze: Place water and sugar into a small saucepan over low heat. Stir until sugar dissolves. Bring to the boil. Boil for 3-4 minutes. Brush warm glaze over warm hot cross buns. Serve warm or at room temperature with a butter as desired.

INGREDIENTS

- 4 cups plain flour
- 2 x 7g sachets dried yeast
- 1/4 cup caster sugar
- 1 1/2 tsp mixed spice
- pinch of salt
- 1 1/2 cups currants
- 40g butter
- 300ml milk
- 2 eggs, lightly beaten

Flour paste

- 1/2 cup plain flour
- 4 to 5 tbsp water

Glaze

- 1/3 cup water
- 2 tbsp caster sugar
- Butter, to serve

This recipe has been adapted from:

<https://www.taste.com.au/recipes/hot-cross-buns-3/7589988d-d90e-47bc-ac30-4aa3a2bc492b>³⁹

As you eat your hot cross buns you might like to watch:

[An Easter Hallelujah Song](#):⁴⁰

Cassandra and Callahan

[Good Friday Godly Play Story](#):⁴¹ Tring Team Parish

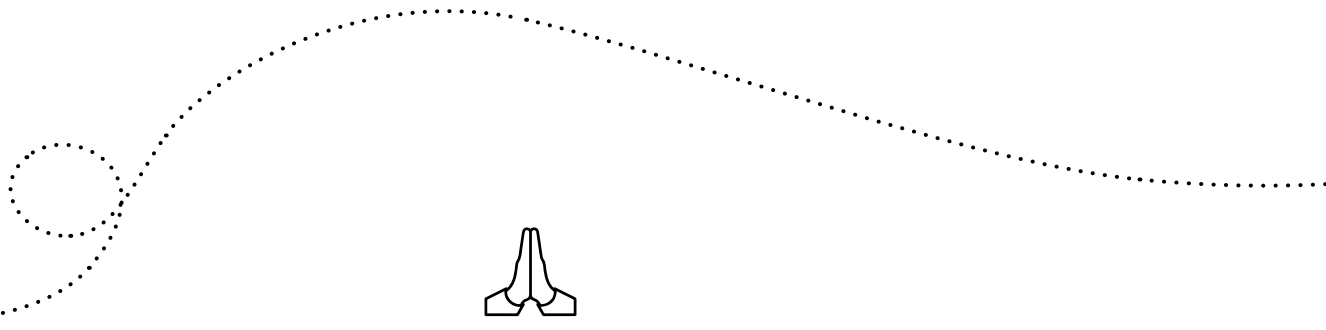
[What's So Good About Good Friday?](#):⁴² Passion

[Confidence](#):⁴³ Sanctus Real

[Little Lights](#)⁴⁴: CBC Kids

What brings light, hope, and confidence to the darkness you experience?

How could you bring light, hope, and confidence to others?



PRAY AND REFLECT



CROSS REFLECTION

Hold a cross or a sharp nail and sit with God.

Reflect on the Good Friday story and be aware of the feelings, thoughts, pictures, and words that you experience.



LIGHT REFLECTION

At night, turn off the lights and sit in the darkness.

What does it feel like to be in darkness?

What are the dark areas of your life, your community, the world?

Turn on a light/torch and sit with the light.

Thank God for the confidence, hope and love that Jesus brought to us through his death.

READ AND REFLECT



Isaiah 52:13-53:12



Psalm 22



Hebrews 10:16-25



John 18:1-19:42

GOOD FRIDAY REFLECTION

Life has difficult moments. Terrible things happen in the world and we might feel sad. We might even wonder where God is? Isn't God meant to look after us, and make sure that things go well? Why does the world feel so dark and unsafe?

Do you feel like that? Or have you ever had a time when you felt like that? It's ok.

When I think of this question, and wonder where God is in the dark and messy times, I think of Jesus on the cross. When we are in those dark moments we sometimes have an image of God as being far away and looking down on all that is going on. In those dark moments it's like he is deciding not to do anything, just letting the bad happen. But the cross reminds us this is not the case. In the cross we see that God is not just sitting far off, watching on. Jesus was not just a great man, but as the carols remind us each Christmas, Jesus is Emmanuel, God come amongst us.

In the dark times, where is Jesus? This week, you might hear or read sections of John 18: 1-19:42. As you hear or read the words, think about where Jesus is. He is arrested and mistreated. He is betrayed by one friend, and denied by another (probably the friend that was closest to him.) He is slapped on the face, he is flogged. He is made to carry a heavy beam of wood. He is nailed to a cross. His clothing is stolen from him. He suffers from thirst, and he dies.

Can you imagine how dark this moment was for Jesus? Jesus went through so much. And ultimately, he died. And so when we are going through hard times, God is not just sitting back far away and unable to understand what we are going through, but rather, through Jesus, God has experienced the darkest times. He has suffered pain and rejection. He has been let down by friends. All those things that we feel, Jesus has been there, he has felt it. God is not far off, but he is in the mess, holding us tight and saying "I know what that feels like. I am here to be with you."

We can have confidence during dark times knowing the things which God has done for us. Yes, the cross, but also remembering the moments God has helped us in our life. And then trusting that God will continue to be there for us. Not sitting far away, but walking with us side by side, and as the old Footprints poem reminds us, sometimes carrying us.

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

How do you feel when you 'see' Jesus in the Easter Story?

When have you felt that 'God was in the mess' with you?

Have you ever experienced confidence during dark times? What or who gave you that confidence?

How might you walk side by side with others living in darkness?



God's Story, Our Story

Easter Sunday - April 20

God's story, spanning all of time, is one of overwhelming love for God's creation. Throughout the Bible, we hear of people destroying, neglecting, and abusing God's perfect creation. We hear of people abandoning God's way and choosing their own way. There is death. There is destruction. There is pain. There is darkness. And yet, through it all, God upends, God challenges, God acts, and God renews in unexpected, unconventional and miraculous ways to bring healing and restoration to creation.

What about our story? As we focus on renewal of our Church, and of our lives, let's think about the ways that God has challenged us, healed us, restored us, and worked in unconventional or miraculous ways to bring healing and restoration to our lives? As we think about all that God has done for us, what is our response going forward? How might we act differently or share God's story with those around us?



FOCUS

What part of God's story is your favourite part?

What part of your life story is your favourite part?



RESURRECTION ROLLS

INGREDIENTS

- ½ cup whole milk (warm)
- 1 tablespoon white sugar
- 2 teaspoons active dry yeast
- 3 tablespoons salted butter (melted)
- 3 tablespoons white sugar
- 1 egg
- ½ teaspoon pure vanilla extract
- **Other Ingredients:**
- ½ teaspoon sea salt
- 3½ teaspoon cinnamon sugar
- 2 cups plain flour
- 8 large marshmallows
- 3 Tablespoons granulated sugar
- 1 teaspoon ground cinnamon
- 2 Tablespoons salted butter (melted)

METHOD

1. Add milk, 1 Tablespoon sugar and yeast to the bowl of a standing mixer fitted with the dough hook and stir to combine. Let the mixture sit for 5-10 minutes or until frothy/foamy. (Alternately, you can mix the dough by hand in a large bowl with a wooden spoon).
2. Add butter, 3 Tablespoons sugar, egg, and vanilla and mix on low speed.
3. Add salt, cinnamon and flour and mix on medium-high speed until a slightly tacky but firm ball forms.
4. Remove dough from the mixer and knead with your hands until smooth.
5. Place dough in a lightly greased bowl and cover with a damp tea towel.
6. Let rise in a warm place for about 1 hour or until dough has doubled in size.
7. Once the dough has doubled in size, roll dough out into a 14" round circle about ¼" thick.
8. Cut the dough into 8 equal-sized triangles.
9. Take one marshmallow and dip it into the melted butter and then roll in cinnamon sugar until completely coated.
10. Place the coated marshmallow in the centre of one of the dough triangles.
11. Fold the dough around the marshmallow and roll it in your hands until it is completely sealed. Repeat with other marshmallows and dough triangles.
12. Place on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper.
13. Cover rolls with a tea towel and preheat your oven to 180 degrees C.
14. Once oven is preheated, bake the rolls for 18-20 minutes or until the rolls are golden brown.
15. Let cool on a wire rack and then peek inside!

This recipe has been adapted from:

<https://joyfoodsunshine.com/homemade-resurrection-rolls/45>

As you eat your Resurrection Cakes you might like to watch:

[Luke 24: Lumo](#)⁴⁶ (Watch all or up to 1.50)

[He is Risen](#)⁴⁷: Angie Killian Music

[He's Alive, He's Alive](#)⁴⁸: Yancy and Little Praise Party

[God is in this Story](#)⁴⁹:
Katy Nichole and Big Daddy Weave

[Tell the Story](#)⁵⁰: Shane and Shane

READ AND REFLECT



Isaiah 65:17-25



Psalms 118:1-2, 14-24



1 Corinthians 15:19-26
OR Acts 10:34-43



John 20:1-18
OR Luke 24:1-12

EASTER SUNDAY REFLECTION

I was given a plant just before I left Toowoomba for Longreach, an Anthurium with glossy leaves and bright red flowers. It has produced no flowers since I got here, and over the summer I have watched as old leaves withered and new leaves never made it to maturity. As I look today it has three withering leaves left. It is not looking good.

BUT... I've moved it away from the drying breezes and we've had some cooler rainy weather. At the base of the plant are several new shoots, slowly emerging from the dead stalks that remain. There is hope growing.

There are times when we need signs of new life. I was ordained in December 2015, then life fell apart. Almost immediately my husband Chris was diagnosed with young onset dementia. In 2017 our town, Proserpine, was damaged by cyclone Debbie. By 2019 the better option was for Chris to go into residential care. Within three months he died suddenly, Mum helped me pack up, I started a new placement as a Hospital Chaplain in Toowoomba and bought a house. 2020 had to be a better year, right?

Not quite. I was a hospital chaplain during a pandemic, my Mum was diagnosed with lymphoma. She died within months. In May 2021 I dismounted from my new horse and destroyed my ACL. An abdominal mass diagnosed in 2022 (thankfully benign) required more surgery. In September 2023 I was told that public hospital chaplaincy would no longer be funded in the new financial year.

I look for signs of hope in a new placement. I see the green shoots of new life in a dry land. Shoots of resilience, trust, deepening spirituality, greater maturity and strength. Joy bubbles again.

We read John's gospel knowing the end of the story and so approach it with excitement. We can't wait to get there, we anticipate the empty tomb. I wonder if we really enter into grief and disillusionment with Mary Magdalen and the Twelve? I think it is time in the shadows that makes the brightness of new life shine more brilliantly.

Mary grieves. She goes to serve her Rabbi in the only way left to her - to anoint his life-less body. Then, panic - it is not there! No wonder she could not understand, only go and tell the bald facts to the others. How heartbreaking! Logic says a missing dead body must have been moved, who would do such a cruel thing? She cannot anoint him, cannot grieve alongside his remains. The others come, check the tomb, go home. She stays at the last place she saw him, she checks the tomb yet again - there are figures seated where Jesus had been.

Surely she didn't see these strangers go in? Still focused on finding Jesus, she turns away from their questioning and sees another figure. The gardener? He might know where Jesus' body is! And Jesus says her name. "Mary." Suddenly ... her full attention. "Rabbi!" Good news to share indeed!

QUESTIONS TO THINK ABOUT:

How do you think you would have reacted to the news of the empty tomb?


When have you noticed the brightness of new life after spending time in the shadows?

If you could create a 'new shoot' in your community, what would it look and/or feel like?

What new shoots may be emerging in your life, or in your Church?

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