

DUNEDIN METHODIST PARISH

Finding Good in everyone Finding God in everyone

www.dunedinmethodist.org.nz



Find us on Facebook: **Dunedin Methodist Parish**

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PARISH BULLETIN

20 February 2022

WORSHIP FOR Sunday 27 February 2022

9.30am	Mornington	R Mitchell
10.00am	Mosgiel	D Poultney
11.00am	Glenaven	R Mitchell
	St Kilda	TBA

DATES TO REMEMBER

Wednesday 23 February, 12noon - Mornington Methodist Women's Fellowship Luncheon

MORNINGTON METHODIST WOMEN'S FELLOWSHIP

2022 NEW YEAR LUNCHEON Wednesday 23rd February in the Mornington Methodist Church at 12 noon.

All members of the Fellowship and friends of the Church are invited to attend this social luncheon.

The committee will be providing the simple lunch of sandwiches and sweet slices to ensure all food is prepared and served in accordance with the current Covid regulations.

We hope you can all join us to discuss your holiday activities and plans for the coming year.

DURING THIS OMICRON OUTBREAK Mission Staff are rotating between working from home and coming in; as someone working out of a Mission building I too am doing this. I will be at the Oxford office on Wednesdays and Fridays and on other days I will work from home and around the community. I am looking at regular times at Mornington and working out of there.

I have been advised that it may not be possible to produce bulletins while staff numbers are down and it is anticipated there will be a significant amount of sickness and self isolation.

If needed I can produce an admittedly less polished product on my office printer. David

A PASTORAL LETTER FROM PRESIDENT ANDREW DOUBLEDAY

16 February 2022

Kia ora koutou katoa

Trying to find certainty during uncertain times can be challenging. We have been blessed with very low covid illness and death rates over the past two years. This was by design using a carefully thought out and implemented national strategy where, for the most part, we have recognised the threat that we face and responded appropriately.

It seems that all this is about to change. The next 3-4 months will undoubtedly differ from anything our nation of communities has ever experienced. Groups like Vahefonua Tonga have not worshipped in person for more than six months and continue their gatherings online. This will likely

be the reality we all need to prepare for. As daily case numbers increase, it may be necessary to make this call within the next week or two. We have done a lot of work up until now, and our current aim should be to help 'flatten the curve' so that our health services and supply lines can be maintained. We, as The Methodist Church, Te Hāhi Weteriana, need to do our part. We also need to prepare to both protect and care for the most vulnerable among us – our shut-ins, those with compromised health conditions, our elderly, where we recognise that we are our brothers and sisters' keepers. This may mean shopping expeditions on their behalf, regular contact by phone, social media, Zoom etc. It will require an openness within us to be intentional about asking what their needs might be. This will impact our future events, not because of lockdown, but because many people may be isolating either because they have Covid-19 or have been potentially exposed to a Covid-positive case.

If you are in a cooperating venture or union parish you will need to understand what the partner churches are asking of you. We ask that you be prepared and have the necessary conversations. During epidemics in the Roman Empire, the Christian church came into its own. While the elite fled the city to their country estates, it was Christians who got stuck in caring for their neighbours at great risk to themselves. We have a rich legacy to follow. Please, be careful, be wise, and love yourself as you love those around you. We will be in touch again soon.

Yours sincerely Andrew Doubleday

President Methodist Church of New Zealand



Cinderella's glass slipper:

What would John Wesley do today?

When the clock struck midnight, Cinderella dashed from the ball before her coach, attractive garments and footwear disappeared but, in her hurry, she left behind a glass slipper. The prince was forlorn to have his dance partner leave so suddenly and the next day tried to find her by letting the young ladies of the village try on the slipper. When it fitted Cinderella perfectly, he

knew he had found again the person of his dreams and they soon married to live happily ever after. Trying on something for size can be a test of whether there is a good fit.

According to James Stuart, in *The John Wesley Code: finding a faith that matters* (Wellington: Phillip Garside Publishing; 2008), John Wesley, 1703–1791, and his small band of Methodist preachers lived as if their lives had a great and higher purpose. They believed that in Jesus of Nazareth, God had spoken to them directly and called each one of them individually to become, as the Apostle Paul once wrote, “agents of reconciliation, ambassadors of Christ” to a disturbed, broken and deeply troubled society. Wesley absorbed the message of Jesus and then tried to apply it to his society. He did things that Jesus never did, such as using electrical devices for healing and warning against the use of alcohol, but saw that he was being true to the teaching of Jesus by applying the approach of compassion to the problems in the 18th century society of his time.

We may wonder what the approach of John Wesley would be to the problems besetting our 21st century society. We can only speculate, but from what we know of Wesley, we can guess that his approach would take account of the advances in knowledge that have occurred in the past three hundred years. The Cinderella glass slipper test would be one way of determining whether or not a particular imagined approach was treated as good news and resulted in a transforming of society, similar to that seen in Wesley’s time. In *New world, new God* (Wellington: Makaro Press; 2018) Ian Harris observes that there is a widespread dissatisfaction with traditional ways of understanding God, and a conviction that the ideas are too important to give up without a struggle. He considers that a common element is that, for many people, thinking about God with integrity in the modern world demands a radically new perspective. He laments that for him the major religious tragedy of our times is that the churches, in official statements and in worship, by and large endorse the view that God cannot and will not change and that the key to a life of faith is to believe all the old things in all the old ways. In contrast, John Wesley was a reformer willing to disregard tradition

and strike out on a new course to meet the problems of his time. It is of interest to consider the possibility that, if he lived now, he may have no longer have believed in an omnipotent creator theistic God able to listen to and respond to human prayers and instead he may have considered alternative ways to help people find the life in abundance that Jesus promised. What would he have thought of the eight rules for life put forward by the atheist and philosopher Alain de Botton and the School of Life, based in part on the writings of various literary notables such as Seneca, Proust, Montaigne, Austen, Dostoevsky and Goethe?

The eight rules are:

1. *Accept imperfection:* We are inherently flawed and broken beings. Perfection is beyond us. Despite our intelligence and our science we are all, from close up, scared, unsure, full of regret, longing and error. No one is normal: the only people we can think of as normal are those we don't yet know very well.
2. *Friendship:* Recognizing that we are, each of us, weak, mad and mistaken should inspire compassion for ourselves —and generosity towards other people. Knowing how to reveal our vulnerability and brokenness becomes the bedrock of true friendship which we universally crave. People do not reliably end up with the lives they deserve. We should embrace the concept of tragedy: random and terrible things can and do befall most lives. We may fail and be good — and therefore need to be slower to judge and quicker to understand. Be kind.
3. *Know your insanity:* We cannot be entirely sane but it is a basic requirement of maturity that we try to understand the ways in which we are insane. We can warn others what our insanities might make us do, early and in good time before we have caused too much damage. We should be able to have a ready answer —and never take offence— if someone asks us (as they should) “So in what ways are you mad?” Most of the madness comes down to childhood which will—in a way unique to our situation— have unbalanced us. No one has yet had a “normal” childhood and that is no insult to the efforts of families.

4. *Accept your idiocy*: Do not run away from the thought that you may be an idiot as if this were a rare and dreadful prospect and insight. Accept the certainty in good grace in full daylight. You are an idiot but there is no other alternative for a human being. We are on a planet of seven billion comparable fools. Embracing our idiocy should render us confident before challenges because messing up is to be expected. It should make us comfortable with ourselves and ready to extend a hand of friendship to our similarly broken and demented neighbours. We should overcome shame and shyness because we have already shed so much of our pride.
5. *Good enough*: The alternative to perfection is not failure. It is to make peace with the idea that we are, each one of us, “good enough.” We are good enough parents, siblings, workers and humans. “Ordinary” is not a name for failure. Understood more carefully and seen with a more generous and perceptive eye, it contains the best of life. Life is not elsewhere; it is fully and properly here and now.
6. *Beyond romanticism*; “The one” is a cruel invention. No one is ever wholly “right” nor indeed wholly wrong. True love is not merely an admiration for strength. It is patience and compassion for our mutual weaknesses. Love is a capacity to bring imagination to bear on a person’s less impressive moments—and to bestow an ongoing degree of forgiveness for our natural fragility. No one should be expected to love us “just as we are.” Genuine love involves two people helping each other to become the best versions of themselves. Compatibility isn’t a prerequisite for love: it is the achievement of love.
7. *Cheerful despair*: We are under undue and unfair pressure to smile but almost nothing will go entirely well. We can expect frustration, misunderstanding, misfortune and rebuffs. We should be allowed to be melancholic. Melancholy is not rage or bitterness. It is a noble species of sadness that arises when we are open to the fact that disappointment is at the heart of human experience. In our melancholy state, we can understand without fury or sentimentality that no one fully understands anyone else, that loneliness is universal and that every life has its full measure of sorrow. But though there is a vast amount to feel sad about, we are not individually cursed and, against the backdrop of darkness, many small sweet things should stand out: a

sunny day, a drifting cloud, dawn and dusk, a tender look. Despair but do so cheerfully. Believe in cheerful despair.

8. *Transcend yourself*: We are not at the centre of anything, thankfully. We are miniscule bundles of evanescent matter on an infinitesimal corner of a boundless universe. We do not count one bit in the grander scheme. That should be a liberation. We should gain relief from the kindly indifference of spatial infinity: an eternity where no one will notice and where the wind erodes the rocks in the space between the stars. Cosmic humility—taught to us by nature, history and, always, the sky above us—is a blessing and a constant alternative to a life of frantic jostling, humourlessness and anxious pride.

De Botton also makes a final point that we know—in theory— about all of it but yet in practice any such ideas have a notoriously weak ability to motivate our actual behavior and emotions. Our best knowledge is both embedded within us and yet is ineffective for us. We forget almost everything. Our enthusiasms and resolutions can be counted upon to fade like the stars at dawn. Nothing much sticks. For this reason we need to go back over things, maybe once a day, certainly once a week. A true good school shouldn't tell us only things we've never heard before. It should be deeply interested in rehearsing all that is theoretically known—yet practically forgotten. That's why we should keep the eight rules in mind.

How well does the glass slipper of the eight rules of life fit the foot of Jesus? What do you think John Wesley's response would be? Can the life in abundance promised by Jesus be brought about without the presence of God the creator, who, for some of us, is very real and can still speak to us and act in our lives? When Wesley preached in the 18th century many listened and reformed their lives in a disciplined methodical manner which brought them full and satisfying lives. At present, the YouTube video *The eight rules of the School of Life* has had over 700, 000 views, 34,000 likes and 1,000 positive comments, a popular response not unlike that encountered by Wesley 300 years earlier. Rather than seeing the Kingdom of God returning at a future date in its own good time and, at the present time when church congregations are declining, being reassured that we are keeping the faith of

those who have gone before us by remaining true to the God we have been taught or found to love, is there room for a new message of helping bring life in abundance now—a message that might seem very different to the mainstream view of what a Christian church should be, because a theistic God is missing, but still be compatible with the compassion associated with Jesus?

We do not know how Wesley would respond if he lived in New Zealand now. He may have considered reform in the Church is a massive task, like climbing Everest, and reminded us of Hillary's advice when climbing mountains "To make haste slowly." We might be advised to curb our enthusiasm for radical change to avoid throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Although the Church may have aspects which could be fine-tuned, it also has facets which have stood the test of time and helped create communities where there was compassion for all, love and caring. Wesley might have commented on the observation of French sociologist Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) that when a sense of community was reduced in favour of an emphasis on the individual, there was a rise in suicide—a problem not unknown in contemporary New Zealand. Perhaps just as romantically there is no "the one," a perfect partner waiting out there for us to find, there is no "the one" in terms of being a perfect nucleus for coalescing community support and caring. He might have encouraged us to all be explorers who continue in dialogue working towards developing a consensus for where our direction for the future should be.

Bruce Spittle