

**The Messenger  
of the Parish of St Thomas, Tamaki  
Summer Edition 2024**



# Lent

## A Season of Reflection, Renewal, and Spiritual Growth

Reverend Doctor Noel Cox

Lent, a period of 40 days observed by Christians leading up to Easter Sunday, holds a special place in the liturgical calendar. Rooted in the biblical narrative of Jesus' 40 days of fasting and temptation in the wilderness, Lent is a season of introspection, penance, and spiritual preparation. While traditionally associated with Christian denominations, its themes of self-reflection and renewal resonate across a broader spectrum of spirituality, offering valuable insights for individuals seeking a time of contemplation and personal growth.

Lent finds its origins in the early Christian church, where it served as a time of preparation for new believers before their baptism at Easter. Over time, the season evolved into a broader period of fasting, prayer, and repentance for the entire Christian community. The 40 days symbolise the biblical accounts of Moses' 40 days on Mount Sinai and Jesus' 40 days of fasting in the wilderness.

The spiritual significance of Lent lies in its invitation to believers to walk in the footsteps of Jesus, embracing a journey of self-denial and spiritual discipline. It is a time to reflect on one's life, acknowledge shortcomings, and actively seek avenues for personal and spiritual growth.

Lent encourages a sincere and heartfelt examination of one's life, fostering an awareness of personal shortcomings and the need for repentance. The act of repentance goes beyond mere remorse; it involves a genuine commitment to change, seeking forgiveness and reconciliation.

Lent provides a designated period for intentional reflection. In the hustle and bustle of modern life, where distractions abound, this season invites individuals to pause, assess priorities, and

contemplate the deeper meaning of their existence. It is an opportunity to consider the alignment of one's actions with personal values and ethical principles.

Central to the Lenten journey is the concept of renewal – a chance to break free from spiritual lethargy and cultivate a deeper connection with one's faith. Through acts of self-discipline, individuals open themselves to the transformative power of spiritual renewal, emerging from the season with a refreshed perspective and a strengthened commitment to living a purposeful life.

While Lent is deeply embedded in Christian tradition, its themes and practices can resonate with individuals from diverse spiritual backgrounds. The universal human experience of grappling with personal challenges, seeking growth, and desiring a sense of purpose makes the Lenten season accessible to a broader population.

The call for self-reflection, a hallmark of Lent, transcends religious affiliations. In a fast-paced world, taking intentional time for self-assessment and contemplation can be a transformative practice for anyone, irrespective of their faith tradition.

The emphasis on fasting and moderation during Lent carries a universal message of mindfulness in consumption. Whether abstaining from certain foods or practices, the principles of moderation and conscious living align with contemporary concerns about sustainability and responsible consumption.

Lenten practices often include acts of kindness, charity, and service to others. These principles are not exclusive to any faith tradition and resonate with a global ethos of compassion and empathy.

Lent, with its rich historical and spiritual roots, stands as a poignant season that beckons individuals to embark on a journey of self-discovery, reflection, and renewal. While deeply rooted in Christian traditions, its universal themes make it a relevant and accessible practice for a general population. In a world filled with noise and

distractions, Lent offers a sacred space for individuals to pause, reevaluate, and emerge with a renewed sense of purpose and a deeper connection to their spiritual journey.

## **Future Church Events**

**From our Vicar**

**At 9 am on Wednesday 14th February** we are having an Ash Wednesday service, with Imposition of Ashes, and Eucharist.

The following day, at **7.30 pm Thursday 15th February**, there is a **concert in our Church** by New Zealand organist Dr Christopher Hainsworth, who has been based in France for twenty years. Admission is by donation.

Further afield, **after Church on 10th March** is our parish AGM. Please consider standing for vestry, if you would like to take a role in the development of the direction of the parish. Otherwise, I encourage all to think about any ideas for improving our work in God's name.

**Palm Sunday is 24th March**, and at **7 pm on 28th March** we will have a **Maundy Thursday service**. The Good **Friday service is 2 pm on 29th March**. There will be an **Easter Vigil at 7 pm on Saturday 30th March**, and the **Easter Sunday service is on 31st March**.

**There will be a parish fair on Saturday 18th May, 10 am to 4 pm**. If you are able to help in any way, please speak to a member of the vestry. It is in aid of the restoration of the stained-glass windows.

# Reaching out to God in Prayer

Peter Newton

When I was about eight, I had a pet goldfish. I noticed one morning that it was struggling, and after another few days it was lying on its side, gasping for life. My family were not particularly religious and not churchgoers, but it must have been around this time that the epic production of "Jesus of Nazareth" starring Robert Powell was on the telly. You'll remember it too Noel!

Anyway, that series had quite a profound impact on me. I didn't start going to church, didn't really know anyone that did, and certainly did not have any evangelical leanings or any type of epiphany. However, I did feel that there was something greater than me, a purpose, design and moral order, a sense of deep love for us coupled with a sense of sadness. That's about as far as it went at eight.

Anyway, back to the goldfish. I prayed for my goldfish, as hard as I could. I begged for a miracle so that my fish would be better again. Well, my goldfish recovered, I was astonished and almost perturbed about this thing called prayer and God really listening to us. Mum noticed the fish was swimming around normally again, she was amazed too. 'Well, that's a little miracle' she said. I'll never forget her saying that. If I had any the hairs would have stood up on the back on my neck at that point. My fish didn't recover for long, and soon died. It might have been his time anyway. But the point was that I felt I'd reached out to God, God listened, and intervened. And showed me God was real. Even a child with a sick goldfish was worthy of His time. God listens. This humorous incident has stayed with me all my life!

Fast forward to the time just before the outbreak of COVID. My sister-in-law Judith discovered she had stage 4 colon cancer. It had spread to her liver. I remember trying to be positive when my wife and I were with her, looking at charts of life expectancy. Her

correcting me when the units of time which I thought were years were months. The diagnosis for pain relief to death. Judith is a medical professional and a fighter, she tried every avenue possible. I prayed and I prayed. That God would grant a miracle and enable her to live, bring up her children and see them as adults. My prayers were earnest and raw. Again and again, I begged for intervention.

Judith then became aware of a specialist in Auckland who wanted to provide another diagnosis. That specialist thought she had a chance. She was put on intensive chemo. After several bouts of treatment, the surgeon told her that the chemo was 'unusually' effective and had shrunk the tumours by 50%. That was small enough for surgery to be feasible. He removed part of her colon and a third of her liver, followed by further extensive chemo. The surgery was successful. A chance meeting with another expert, prepared to give her a chance, saved her life. Judith is still with us, has had repeated surgery but her cancer is under control and manageable. She can now live a normal life. Judith is in our weekly prayer list. I'd opened my heart to God, as I had with my goldfish, and again God listened. I'm a rational, science following individual – but Judith's survival, a chance meeting, an alternative prognosis, an incredibly strong response to treatment - they are, for me, another miracle. Just like my goldfish.

How does this work? Why do some people have miracles and not others? Does God only listen to some and not others? No. Are some people more deserving? No. Do I have a rational explanation? Not a good one. Can we ever understand? All I know is that there is a covenant, a contract with our Creator. Through communion and faith, we derive strength and hope. For some, more. Our side of the bargain is to give more than we take, to accept we are flawed and to be the best we can be, to love each other, to love and glorify God.

**"Let your light so shine before men, that they **may see your good works**, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."**

## **Inspired by reading Luke Chapter 18**

By Alan Blake

Two men went into church to take communion.

One man thought to himself thus: I am a professional man, an esteemed person in my field. Not for that matter like this clod beside me. I am on the synod from this parish.

I go easy on the alcohol once every two weeks, and I've gifted a lot of money to special church projects. My wife runs the local U3A. I'm proud to pay my rates and taxes (because I have managed to claim quite a few tax breaks). If I were made an ONZM within the next year I would think it deserved.

The wizened badly-dressed fellow next to him barely lifted his eyes to take the cup and thought: the job I do on the roads barely feeds us and our five kids, though my wife works too. Paying for rent and enough food for those big boys is a problem. There are school costs we can't meet. We usually worry about our cars holding together from week to week. Yes, I know we spend more than we should on booze and takeaways, and haven't really followed the budgeting advice that we got. I know there is a God but please let him give me a break.

Jesus said: which of these two men shall in the end be exalted?

## **In Mary Sumner's Footsteps**

By Katherine McIntyre

It all started when Mary, married to George, Rector of the Parish of Old Alresford, was passionate about transforming the home-lives of Parish families, by helping the women to support one another in raising their children.



Her husband was very supportive: "just share your heart – God will do the rest."

She was so nervous at the first meeting of the parish women, that she refused to speak, and asked George to take her place. In those days, it was very unusual for a woman to be a public speaker. However, George encouraged her to speak from the heart and it went so well that she found the courage to speak at future meetings. Her talks were inspired by her faith – it was practical and down to earth – "Remember, Ladies, to be yourselves, what you would have your children be".

After groups with women became well established, she was asked to speak to the men of the Parish. Again, she was apprehensive, but agreed, and helped them to be more aware of what their wives did for them, to show more respect and love.

The meetings grew, and included women - old and young, rich and poor. Others heard about her work, and started groups in their own areas.

In 1876, she founded "the Union of Mothers" – with a membership card and promise: "to be given up, body and soul, to Jesus Christ in Holy Baptism, and your duty is to train your children for his service".

In 1885, at a time when it was still unheard of for women to speak to large audiences, Mary Sumner was invited by the Presiding Bishop to speak to a packed church congress session for women in Portsmouth. He anointed her with the authority to speak - he felt that he had no authority to speak to a group of women whose prime concern was to get enough food on the table so that the children would not starve. She overcame her nerves again. "Together, by the Grace of God... we can calm each other when we are afraid; strengthen one another when we are weak; and work together to raise our children to the glory of God. Unity is strength".

The movement grew further, increasingly with the support of bishops, internationally as well as in England. Some key principles were

developed, including:

**That the prosperity of a nation springs from the family life in its homes**

**That family life is the greatest institution in the world for the formation of the character of children**

**That faith is the foundation of family life**

**That the tone of family life depends upon the married life of the parents – and ultimately, that example is stronger than precept**

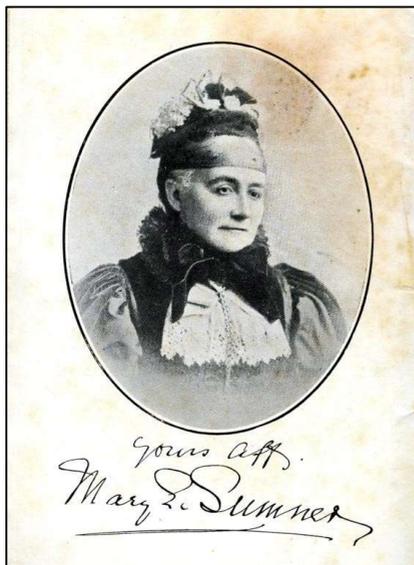
As the movement continued to grow, Mary Sumner asked herself what its purpose really was, and what it should strive for. She reflected: "A true home should be a light-house, shedding its quiet beams far and wide" – her dream was for every home to be filled with the light and love of Jesus, and for the movement to unite many hearts in many lands, nurturing healthy environments for little children.

She was a living example of what she preached. From 1900 onwards, she and the members started to advocate on issues of key importance to families and children – she campaigned to stop children collecting alcohol from public houses for their families, and for the age of marriage for girls to be raised from 12 to 16. She was not afraid to speak up on difficult issues, despite resistance from members of the establishment.

She was also not afraid to act outside the social norms, to do what she believed to be right. At a time when unmarried girls with children were condemned and cast out, she cared for and protected her niece and her illegitimate son.

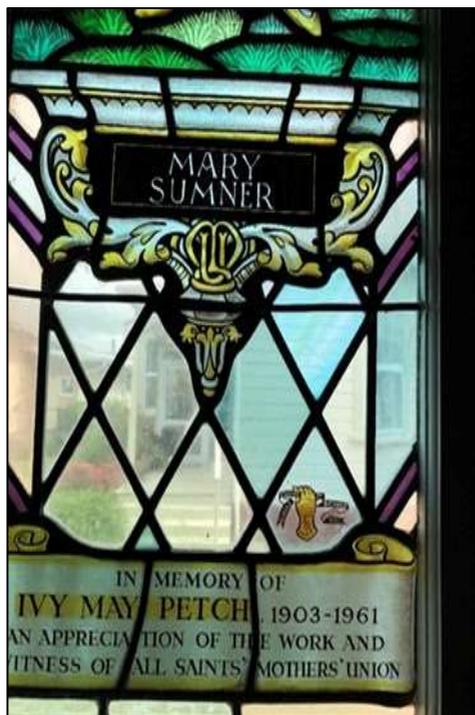
When she died in August, 1921, 4,000 women attended her funeral, which was a service of Thanksgiving. The last memory was one of her, on her feet in the sunlight, praising God.

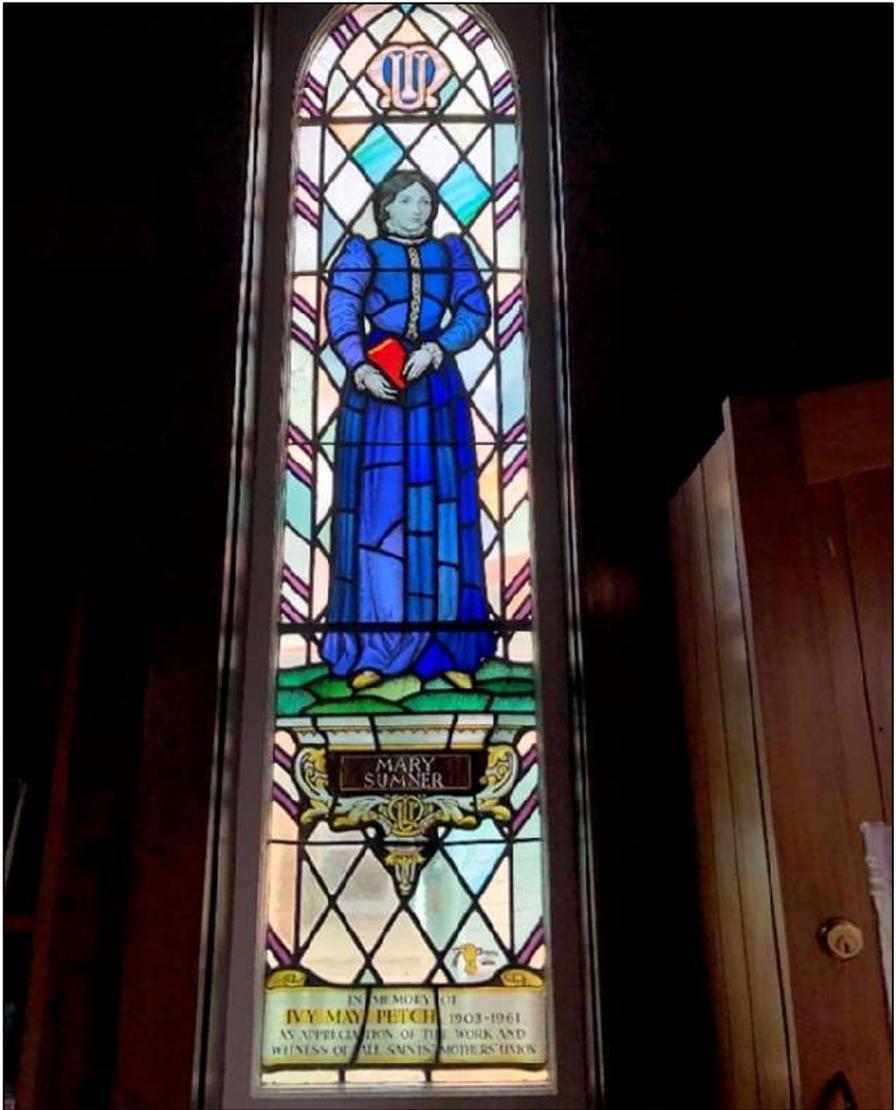
She could not have conceived how the seeds which she planted would grow into a movement 4 million strong today, of members in 83 countries putting their faith into action to nurture healthy relationships in families and communities and to fight for social justice.



In New Zealand, when Mothers' Union (MU) was replaced by Anglican Association of Women (AAW) in most areas of New Zealand, the relevance of Mary Sumner's legacy was lost in this far-flung country. However, those who have continued membership with MU have determinedly kept the faith and the prayer rituals of Mary Sumner's personal and midday prayer. Her vision for Christian marriage and family are even more necessary in this modern age. How delighted we are that, with the resurgence and interest in Mothers' Union Aotearoa and Polynesia, many treasures are being rediscovered. Banners are being rejuvenated, and this beautiful stained-glass window (pictured below and next page) featuring Mary Sumner, displayed in the All- Saints Church, Eltham, has become a place of pilgrimage for MU Members within New Zealand. Prior to Covid lockdown, a local contingent of Mothers' Union members was planning to visit Eltham. Thanks to the enthusiasm of Fiona Martin

and Elizabeth Trundle, I recently had the opportunity to visit this Church, to meet the Vicars Paul and Wynne Bowers-Martin, and to see the exquisite 6ft stained glass window showing Mary in a vibrant blue dress holding the Holy Bible. We knelt in prayer and Liz tolled the bell to reflect our joy before sharing hospitality with the Co-vicars (see picture 2 pages over)





MARY  
SUMNER

IN MEMORY OF  
**IVY MAY PETCH** 1903-1961  
AS A TESTIMONY OF THE WORK AND  
WITNESS OF ALL SAINTS MOTHERS UNION

Elizabeth Trundle Tolling the Bell at Eltham Anglican Church



## **Sunhill Garden Centre & Cafe**

Along St Johns Road, a short stroll from St Thomas is the newly opened Sunhill Garden Centre and Cafe. Mothers' Union members gathered for a blessing and committee meeting. We adapted the House blessing in our Prayer Book, while Members encircled the property. Donna, the proprietor, welcomed us. Photos on the next page show a small section of the MU members present, and Donna with two of the MU members.



Katherine Macintyre and some of the MU members present



Donna, the proprietor, with Katherine Mcintyre and Margaret Wilson

## **Important Notice**

### **Please read carefully**

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