

UCANZ 260316

Kia ora e te whanau

Easter looms large.

And we face a time of international uncertainty, which is spilling over into our national, local and personal lives. We face challenges ahead. I've struggled as I've read posts on social media by those who confidently quote scripture, and justify the horrors of what has been happening in Gaza, the West Bank, and now (again) in Lebanon and Iran, at the hands of Israel and the USA.

Apparently, God supports this brutality – they (Israel and the USA, and their leaders) are God's 'chosen'. As an Evangelical (though that may be contested by many of my 'friends'), I find myself deeply perplexed. As we were leading up to the November 2024 presidential elections in the USA, I was discovering that my God stood for 'Jesus, Babies, and Guns' – apparently supported by 'he who shall not be named' who is consequently the current president – all because my brothers and sisters fell in behind him to ensure that their 'freedoms' were protected.

Where does the Easter story fit into all of this? In his little book 'NOT IN IT TO WIN IT' Andy Stanley eloquently lays out Jesus' plan – as he heads to Jerusalem. He tells his disciples what's ahead – his arrest, brutalisation, crucifixion, and death. They ask, "So, how are you going to win then, Jesus?" Effectively his response, "That's how – we win by losing". Kingdom of God values turn everything on their head. We win by losing – isn't that the truth!

Yet here we are. And Easter looms large.

Leadership & Personal Development Resources

You've Probably Read AI Writing Today. Here Are 7 Surefire Ways to Spot It

I've barely engaged with AI. I guess 'Word' suggesting the completion of the word I'm on and correcting my spelling and attempting to correct my grammar, counts. Yet, I'm encountering it repeatedly. I posted some concerns a couple of months ago (Newsletter 19 Jan). While I appreciate the article I'm referencing here, there are a couple of other 'tells'. One is that the speaker/writer never seems to 'draw breath', and it's all too perfect. The other is the preacher's tool of using 'triplets' – when One is speaking we only get one chance – what we say needs to strike first time, so we use triplets to make sure that we've been heard, that the listener has got the message, that the point has been made. See what I did there? Triplets. Not so important in written text, as we can revisit what we've just read. In verbal communication, a practice worth cultivating – we only get one first strike.

The article can be accessed here: <https://www.pcmag.com/explainers/youve-probably-read-ai-writing-today-here-are-7-surefire-ways-to-spot-it>

You're Asking ChatGPT the Wrong Questions. Try My Secret Formula for Creating AI Prompts That Actually Work

In for a penny, in for a pound. From the same author and the same Website, I found this article useful – for those other neophytes out there, being tempted to dip our toes into the AI world, this looks like a really good set of tips to start with. Getting this bit wrong may well lead to either disillusionment or confirmation that AI is not all that it's cracked up to be - simply because we're not understanding how it works, and therefore not approaching it in a way that will likely give us what we're seeking. The article can be accessed here: <https://au.pcmag.com/ai/116556/youre-asking-chatgpt-the-wrong-questions-try-my-secret-formula-for-creating-ai-prompts-that-actually>

How leaders can use a simple strategy called 'beat the plan' to speed decision-making and build trust

This one, from a Fortune 500 CEO really appealed to me. It struck me that it could usefully be used by the church, certainly at a congregational level, to help us break what often is the gridlock on 'What now? What do we do next?' We so often get caught up with the question 'What does God want us to do?' - looking for some magical sense of a strategy being announced in a 'spiritual' way. This article helps us to engage in a process that allows us to step back and consider alternatives in a more open way. It can be engaged with here: <https://fortune.com/2026/03/14/ceo-coach-fortune-500-how-leaders-can-use-a-simple-strategy-decision-making/>

Homilies and Preaching Resources

My response to the lectionary for the 22nd of March is titled "*On Being Lazarus*" - reflecting on John's account of the death, and resuscitation 4 days later, of Lazarus. In the notes below the video, I included a link to a 2013 RNZ interview between Kathryn Ryan (Nine-to-Noon host) and Dr Sam Parnia – an Intensive Care Specialist (USA) who has deeply studied the process we call death. Well worth a listen, I also include the link here:

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/ninetoon/audio/2559162/feature-guest-sam-parnia>

The lectionary text is John 11 vs 1-45, and the homily can be engaged with here:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GfSXnOPcdJI>

Gospel Conversations - out of the Dunedin Anglican Diocese. They host a conversation of 4 Theologians / Practitioners - until this year around the Gospel lectionary text for the coming Sunday. The site with all its options can be accessed here: <https://www.calledsouth.org.nz/gospel-conversations/>. Led by Michael Godfrey, rather than the Gospel text, they are focusing on the first reading (traditionally known as Old Testament). For this coming Sunday the 22nd of March, it's the text concerning the valley of dry bones as found in Ezekiel 37 vs 1-14 . It can be accessed here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loai2wowL_U

Rev Darryn Hickling (Methodist colleague leading the Rolleston Project) has posted a brief reflection on Instagram – focussing on the Lazarus story found in John 11 vs 1-45. Titled 'Something Stinks' it can be accessed here:

https://www.instagram.com/reel/DV7_QgFj1Ue/?igsh=MTQ2MDI3cHNtdzloMQ==

Again, it will help broaden all our reach if you '**subscribe**' and '**like**'.

Once again, use the videos as you will.

Finally.

As always, if you find you'd prefer not to receive this weekly newsletter, please let me know and your address will be removed.

Ngā manaakitanga

Andrew Doubleday

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Uniting Congregations
OF AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND