

## One year on and still not normal



Can you remember what you were up to a year ago? Shopping without anxiety? Carefree thoughts about Australia, but perhaps pondering about reports of a strange new flu overseas? Planning international holidays or even interstate ones? A year ago now seems like a world away. So much has changed.

Whistleblowing doctor Li Wenliang sent his now famous message from Wuhan about a new virus at the end of December 2019. By the end of January, COVID-19 was reported in nearly 20 countries.

The common cup at Communion was suspended on 16 March last year, with churches shutting their buildings in Queensland on 23 March. But it was around the start of March 2020 that so-called '[panic buying](#)' became a visible sign that things were not normal, with Australia nearly topping the global 'panic buying index'.

Over this last Christmas, my family members shared their last 'normal' photos with each other: a horde of people at Pub Choir, bishops sitting close together at a pre-coronavirus consecration, and one taken by a mother – an almost trivial photo of her son receiving the car keys to a new car. It was to be a long time before mother and son were reunited. What was your last normal photo?

One year in to this, it almost feels like we are approaching a new normal. We seem to take a lot of this in our stride. On 8 January 2021, Greater Brisbane went into a three-day 'lockdown', followed by a period of mandatory mask wearing. I had occasion to be in the centre of Brisbane one lunch time and to my surprise almost everyone, including me, was wearing a face mask, and just getting on with life. That was the real surprise – we were collectively doing something which I suspect a year before we thought we would never do. And, we did it with aplomb.

Even with our churches, Queenslanders have taken online streaming, physical distancing, venue checking in, record keeping and hand sanitising in our stride.

Recently I asked experienced priests to provide short videos on [Anglican Vocations Southern Queensland YouTube](#) for first incumbents. The tips are marvellous, but just as marvellous is the matter-of-factness of the filming of these short videos. So much has been learned over the last year, not least that we are more adaptable than we previously might have thought.

One aspect that has not been easy for many of us has been Holy Communion. I dare say we are mindful of churches around the world that cannot even meet in person – churches that can still only have streamed services. So it might seem churlish to mention that for almost a year now we have had communion in one kind only.

Recently priest and broadcaster The Rev'd Giles Fraser, in London, tweeted with his usual directness: "You can no more receive the body and blood of Christ over Zoom as you can go to the dentist over Zoom."

That our churches have either not been able to celebrate communion, or have had that celebration curtailed, has for many of us been one of the ongoing wounds of COVID-19. For me, I will not feel we are back to normal until Holy Communion has returned in its fullness.

Much has changed over this last year. And, even though we have learned and adapted with tenacity, I look forward to presiding over Eucharists where the cup is once again offered to all.

**Sunday Devotions • Sunday 21 February 2021 • By The Rev'd Dr Timothy Nicholson**

## **Sunday Devotion: 28 February 2021, Second Sunday in Lent**

Can I have some chocolate now?



**Main Readings:** [Genesis 17.1-7, 15-16](#); [Psalm 22.24-32](#); [Romans 4.13-25](#); [Mark 8.31-38](#) or [Mark 9.2-9](#)  
[Transfiguration Gospel]

**Supplementary Readings:** [Psalm 121](#); [Galatians 1.11-24](#); [Jeremiah 11.9-20](#); [Psalm 119.49-56](#); [Mark 14.27-52](#)

"From you springs my praise in the great congregation" (Psalm 22.26)

As a young schoolboy I was told that Lent was a time to 'give things up', which usually seemed to mean chocolate! Lent was a miserable time for me, as I liked chocolate a lot! Easter, and the filled eggs, seemed an inordinate time away. Often Lent seems like this, we focus on psalms of lament, we choose less exuberant hymns to sing, and we long for the bright sounds and signs of Easter. Does this mean that joyful praise is put on hold?

Not at all. Our psalm this week reminds us that we can still give praise in the dark times. The psalm which begins with the words that Jesus quotes on the Cross, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me", goes on to affirm that God does not hide God's face from us, as he hears us as we cry to him (verse 25). And this, indeed, leads us to praise.

We are reminded that even in dark times and in times of waiting, God is with us and offers his assurance of the 'Easter' that is to come. As we live with this hope, it is something that we can tell our friends about as we sing our praise in 'the great congregation'.

So, can I have some chocolate now?