

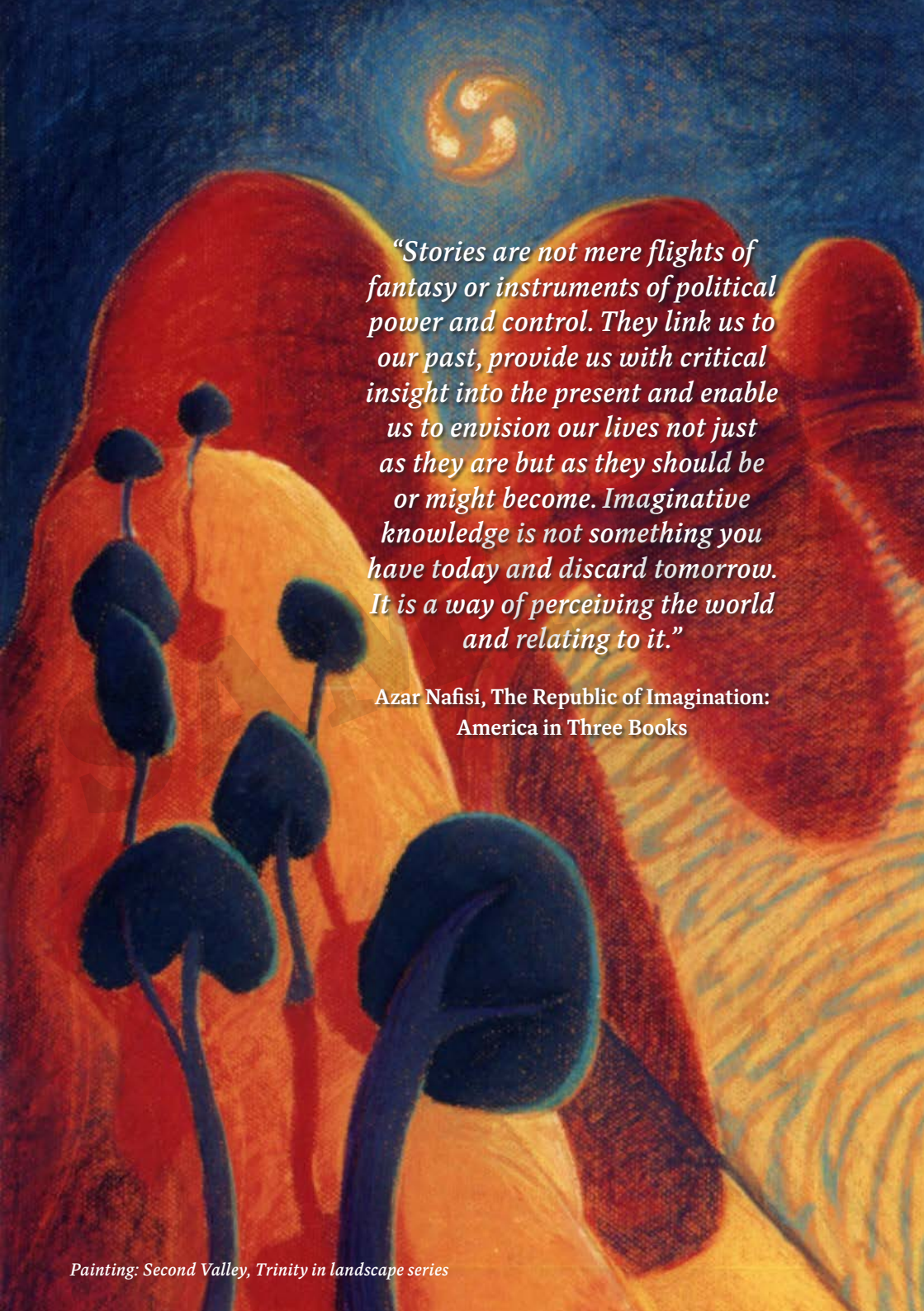


THE IMAGINARY DOORWAY

**Stories and studies from
the Gospel of Inclusion**

Written by Stephen Daughtry

Art by Vanessa Daughtry



"Stories are not mere flights of fantasy or instruments of political power and control. They link us to our past, provide us with critical insight into the present and enable us to envision our lives not just as they are but as they should be or might become. Imaginative knowledge is not something you have today and discard tomorrow. It is a way of perceiving the world and relating to it."

Azar Nafisi, *The Republic of Imagination: America in Three Books*

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THE IMAGINARY DOORWAY

INTRODUCTION

For many of us, the moment Lucy chose to walk further into the wardrobe and emerge in Narnia was the moment we received our invitation into a world of wonder and heroism and delight. C S Lewis's book¹ has aged, and some of the concepts are becoming more alien to us, even odd, but the imaginative journey remains untouched. The realm of Aslan is not safe, but it is inviting – and very real to those who walk through the imaginary door.

There is something about the imaginative worlds we inhabit when we read great stories that allows us to form values and determine how we wish to inhabit the real world. We develop empathy and we encounter situations that test our sense of ourselves.

Strangely, we can shy away from using the same imaginative and empathetic gifts when encountering the Bible. And yet, the Bible itself invites us to step into strange lands and understandings. There are some who argue that we must read it in as plain a fashion as possible, adding nothing and taking nothing away. Such a suggestion is as fanciful as the most speculative fiction, ignoring the reality that we are incapable of reading without shaping the story through our own experiences and imagination.

When scripture is read in church, no two people hear the same story. Each of us imagines scripture to life, through our lived experiences, through the people that we know, through the images we have received (in illustration, painting, film), and through the creativity of our own minds. In addition to this, within each of us the Spirit is working differently. Each of us hears and sees – and remembers - a different story.

This truth is reflected in the existence of four Gospels. Despite the similarities between the Synoptic Gospels, there remain four unique stories of the life of Jesus, each different, each from a distinct

1 Lewis, C. S. (1950). The lion, the witch and the wardrobe.

community. Each focussing particularly on things that a particular community of faith thought important to communicate to each other, and to future generations. So, when we talk about the 'Gospel' we are not simply talking about the written word. The 'Gospel' that lives within us – the Good News – is a living story, coalescing in our hearts and minds through the unique combination of our imaginative powers, the work of the Spirit – and drawing on the four Gospel stories contained in our Bibles. The Gospels communicate to us the 'Gospel', the good news expressed by Jesus when he stood in the synagogue and read from the Prophet Isaiah (Luke 4.18-19) and expressed by Jesus in his life, death and resurrection, through which he redeemed the whole creation and invited us to fully participate in the love and family of God. Through which God included us.

This multiplicity of received stories is not strange to us. In some ways it mirrors an Anglican approach to the Eucharist, as expressed by Richard Hooker's idea of Receptionism, in which the bread and wine become the Body and Blood when placed in the hands of the faithful receiver, but do not when faith is absent. The spiritual, sacramental, liturgical 'story' is mediated through the lens of the receiver of the story. The spiritual imagination is fired and enlivened by the Spirit, and each person receives differently.



"Let it therefore be sufficient for me presenting myself at the Lord's table to know what there I receive from him, without searching or inquiring of the manner how Christ performeth his promise..."

Richard Hooker, Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity V.67.12

In simpler – and less theological terms, this is true of the way we read all the stories we love. Think of the work of Jane Austen, J.K.Rowling, or any other of your favourite authors. Choose your favourite character. Before we saw the films and television adaptations of their work, we all had a different picture of these characters. Unique pictures formed in

our own imagination. The surroundings, the clothing, the vehicles, the landscapes.....for each of us the picture was different. There will have been similarities, but no uniformity. And yet the essential, living story that emanates from the words on the page, often rings entirely true for each of us, despite those differences. This is where the work of the imagination collides with the intent and power of the author and the story.

This is why the Gospel is always both old and new in every age. Why it is both fixed and changing. Because each of us, as we hear the story of the Gospel, as we read the four Gospels, imagine for ourselves a picture of the new world, the kingdom of God, that Jesus initiated and which the Spirit guides towards the eventual future when we will see face to face and not through the dark glass of our fragile, beautiful, temporal existence.

These studies aim to take you on an imaginative journey into the lives of some of the people Jesus encountered. They were not people who ever wished to make it into the story of scripture. They were, on the whole, people who had real needs that were met through their encounter with Christ. Seeing them as 'real', rather than as props in a story that is only about Jesus, makes the encounters – and the people – matter.

This is also the story of mission; be it mission overseas or mission at home. If we engage in mission without regard to the real, individual, unique humanity of those we engage with, our efforts will be a denial of their God-given importance. If our mission is all about purpose rather than relationship, we miss the point. In the incarnate life of Jesus, God chose to walk the messy road of genuine relationship, engaging with the troubles and joys of those he knew and cared about. In this way he was most clearly able to express love and healing for those experiencing exclusion and isolation.

The 'Gospel' is the story of God inviting us in. Of us being seen and made welcome. Of our reception into God's own family. These are stories of people hearing good news, being released, experiencing recovery and stepping into freedom. These are stories from the Gospel of radical inclusion.



THE AUTHOR AND THE ARTIST

Steve Daughtry

is an Anglican priest and Education Missioner for ABM, for whom he has worked (in two stints) for over fifteen years. He previously worked as an actor and theatre director for 25 years and is the author of many plays, which have been performed in schools and theatres around Australia and overseas.

He is a published poet, and has worked as a journalist, editor & filmmaker. He has given the occasional sermon, here and there. For over thirty-five years he has been working with the Gospel stories, always trying to open doors that allow people to glimpse and get to know God. Many projects have been shared with Vanessa and he is thrilled to have been able to work on this book with her. They have been married since 1988 and have three fabulous children and one glorious grandchild! Not that they're biased at all!!



Vanessa Daughtry

Vanessa Daughtry is grateful that the lifegiver and pain bearer who loves us best, invited her into a beautiful, restored life at a lost moment in her twenties. Visual art was part of that healing journey.

Since finding the love of her life, they have created and launched three fabulous humans and a theatre company for young people. More recently her heart has been cracked open wider, loving the children's partners and one Holy grandchild.

"I am grateful to Stephen for the invitation and loving support to draw and paint again for his stunning, reimagined stories of the subversive, invitational power of Jesus."

Much of the Artwork is retrospective. *'The land in my blood'* series draws on the theme of being changed by walking in nature and land holding a history of violence in Australia. The *'Icon of the presence'* series attempts to paint a theophany of

the presence of God as a face of light in her mind's eye as she lived a difficult decision. The *'Loved one'* series is based on her childhood fascination with the moon 'following' the car, shedding its light on the water straight towards each of us – a metaphor for each being known and loved.

The few recent images build on themes above, introducing regeneration, supporting nature to heal nature. In the 'woman accused...' she imagines Jesus drawing a firm line in the sand against judgment and violence towards women by men (echoed currently). As he draws and we change, lifegiving water rises, growth springs up, regeneration of culture and country begins!

Vanessa now has the pleasure and privilege of accompanying others as a Clinical Counsellor. She has a B.A. in Visual Art and a M.A. in Counselling Practice. She is a registered Clinical Counsellor and Supervisor and a member of PACFA. www.heartgardener.com

THE 5 MARKS OF MISSION

- **Witness to Christ's saving, forgiving and reconciling love for all people**
- **Build welcoming, transforming communities of faith**
- **Stand in solidarity with the poor and needy**
- **Challenge violence, injustice and oppression, and work for peace and reconciliation**
- **Protect, care for and renew life on our planet**

(Anglican Board of Mission - Australia)

The Marks of Mission were originally articulated at the Anglican Consultative Council in 1984 with updates in 1990 and 2012. They are not a final and complete statement on mission but they offer a practical guide to the holistic nature of mission. ABM has translated the Anglican Communion's official Marks of Mission (below) to adapt to our specific context. You might like to have a go at translating the Marks of Mission for your own particular context.

The mission of the Church is the mission of Christ

1. To proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom
2. To teach, baptise and nurture new believers
3. To respond to human need by loving service
4. To transform unjust structures of society, to challenge violence of every kind and pursue peace and reconciliation
5. To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth

(Anglican Consultative Council)



HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

Please bear in mind that this is only a suggested way to use the studies. Each person or group will have different allocations of time and talents, interest and engagement. Maybe this way will work for you or your group and maybe not. Perhaps you'll find that some things work really well for you or your group and others not so much. Perhaps you will find that you don't - or can't - use all the sections. In the end, use the studies in a way that enriches your understanding and engagement with Jesus and the story.

STEP 1. READING THE SCRIPTURE

Each study begins with scripture readings, which you are encouraged to read alone and/or together as a group. After the reading, take a few moments individually to record or remember your initial response to the text. We ground ourselves in the rhythms of the Bible.

STEP 2. READING THE STORY

Read the story together. If you have people who are confident to read, and read with good expression and volume, it might be good to ask them to read to the group. Otherwise, give people time to read the story and immerse themselves in the re-imagining of the scene. Or you might do both. If some people are resistant to storytelling, or find it emotionally charged, don't worry. Everyone responds differently.

STEP 3. REFLECT

Spend some time thinking or talking together about the responses you have had to the story. Can you imagine it happening like that? Does it seem unlikely? See what it sparks in you and ask questions of each other about any ideas raised. It is important that everyone is free to speak if they wish and that their response is respected, regardless of any difference of opinion. You may choose to set time limits or ask people to sum up their responses in a minute or two. In this section – as with all the others – the leader needs to ensure that no single voice dominates the group or determines the 'right' way to respond. Good leadership requires courage but will allow for a much more open and honest conversation.

STEP 4. THE QUOTE

Take turns reading these. Does it help you to see things from another angle? If so, great! If not....move on.

STEP 5. AN ABM RESPONSE

ABM's work in the field of mission is connected with the same priorities that Jesus outlined when he stood to speak in the synagogue at Nazareth. As the national mission agency of the Anglican Church of Australia, ABM takes seriously the business of working for love, hope and justice in a world that remains unreconciled. These short sections give you an opportunity to see how ABM is responding and invite you to consider praying for or financially supporting that ongoing work.

STEP 6. DISCUSS

The 'discuss' section offers an invitation to go deeper into the story and think about how it relates to the world in which we live. The story of scripture has to have an impact in our lived reality – so this section is important. Again, you might ask someone to read this section to the group and then invite responses. Some good starting questions might be, “Do you agree with the writer?”, or “Did anything stand out to you?”. Or you might simply like to go on to the printed questions.

STEP 7. QUESTIONS

The questions are grouped in three categories: Individual, Community and Church. You can use them in whatever order you desire, and you can choose which questions resonate for - and work with - your group. Don't feel the need to answer everything and if there is no response to a question, move on to the next.

ADDITIONAL CREATIVE RESOURCES

Each study has a final section with a song and some poetry or prose. These might be useful for individual study or reflection times or to use as a way of 'stilling' your group at certain points. Again, they are offerings and in no way compulsory. Many people have loved these offerings in our previous studies, and we hope you enjoy them and learn more about the artists who produce them.

Remember... (for those doing the study during Lent)

LENT IS A TIME TO CONNECT

Since the fourth century, the six weeks prior to Easter have been set aside by Christians as a special time of prayer, fasting and reflection. As we spend time together during this Lenten period, we turn our hearts and minds to what Jesus did, not just in the week of His passion, but also in His life and His actions towards others. Lent is a time to **CONNECT** with Christ, each other and those around us.

LENT IS A TIME TO GROW

Above all Lent prepares us for the coming of Easter that we may truly GROW into the spirit of Easter; to GROW in our understanding and experience of the passion of Christ, the joy of the hope of new life and in our response to the Spirit's call to follow Christ in the world.

LENT IS A TIME TO SERVE

It gives us time to reflect on our needs, the needs of others and all that we have and do. There has come to be a custom of 'giving up for Lent'. Not only are we called to 'give up for Lent', we are also called to 'take up the Cross' and SERVE the world around us.

LENT IS A TIME TO GIVE

The mission of God is always one of giving. Lent reminds us that we are called to live out in the world the self-sacrificing, self-spending life of Christ. As the Easter Community we are free to practice a radical generosity as we GIVE ourselves, in Jesus' name, to each other.

BIBLE TRANSLATIONS

When doing Bible studies, people often worry about which version they should read. We have usually chosen to use the text from the NRSV in these studies...but...having a range of translations and versions will sometimes help you to discover more in the text. Whatever you regularly read will do the job if you invite the Spirit to read with you and don't get too precious about your version being the correct one. Let's always remember that we all read from translations - and no translation can be perfect.



JESUS FORGIVES AND HEALS A PARALYSED MAN

LUKE 5:17-26

One day, while he was teaching, Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting nearby (they had come from every village of Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem); and the power of the Lord was with him to heal. Just then some men came, carrying a paralysed man on a bed. They were trying to bring him in and lay him before Jesus; but finding no way to bring him in because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the middle of the crowd in front of Jesus. When he saw their faith, he said, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you.' Then the scribes and the Pharisees began to question, 'Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can

forgive sins but God alone?' When Jesus perceived their questionings, he answered them, 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you", or to say, "Stand up and walk"? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins'—he said to the one who was paralysed - 'I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.' Immediately he stood up before them, took what he had been lying on, and went to his home, glorifying God. Amazement seized all of them, and they glorified God and were filled with awe, saying, 'We have seen strange things today.'



STUDY 3
STEVO

Bart and Phil and Matt and me. I'm Mark. Not 'that' Mark, just Mark. Like Matt's not 'that' Matt either. We're not special and we're not claiming to be. Just happened to be us that did that thing. That day. We wouldn't even have done it if Stevo's mum hadn't gone the whole weeping and wailing thing on us. Didn't feel like we had a lot of choice after that. Anyway, just saying. Not big-noting ourselves. Just telling you what happened.

Anyway, going back. Stevo's one of us. We're just workers. One day here, six months there, depending on what's available. We get by. We have fun. We all grew up together, in each other's houses, doing dumb stuff. We look out for each other. We're mates.

One day we're working, picking olives, raking them out of trees. Bart's being an idiot and throwing olives at everyone. Sticking them up his nose, in his ears, just trying to get a laugh out of us. But it was hot and Stevo got narky with him, telling him pull his head in. Red rag to a bull. Bart starts chucking handfuls at Stevo, and Stevo loses it. He charges at Bart but slips on all the olives. He goes down like the wall of Jericho and just lies there. Well, the rest of us just crack up. We're rolling about the ground, shaking with laughter. Then Phil, always the sensible one of us, tells us to shut up. Stevo hasn't moved. He not laughing. He's not doing anything.

We go over to where he's lying, and we can tell something's not right. Stevo can be a pain, but he doesn't hold a grudge. He can take a joke. Matt and me, we reach down to grab his hands to pull him up but Phil, Phil screams at us to stop. He can see something we can't. Stevo's trying to talk. He's got tears in his eyes. "Get up you big idiot", says Bart, helpfully. He doesn't move a muscle. He can't move a muscle. He can't move. He's smashed something. Inside. When we made a stretcher out of branches to get him home, and lifted him gently on to it, we saw the rock. Under his back. Not a big rock. Big enough. Smashed something.

Took him back to his parents and they just looked at us. His dad went real quiet. His mum started to cry, but without any sound at all. They knew. They knew he wasn't going to get up. Ever. We didn't understand that then. We were indestructible.

We visited every day. At first. Then every few days. Work, you know. Then every week. Then....when we could. Except Bart. He felt real bad. Couldn't face Stevo's folks. He went real quiet and he stopped making jokes. He was feeling it. Thought it was his fault. We told him it was just dumb luck, but he wasn't having that. He felt real bad.

Stevo could talk, but he didn't say much. It wasn't good. Nothing was good anymore.

Then that day. Whole town buzzing. Some visiting Rabbi. Bloke called Jesus. People going loopy all over the shop. I'm as religious as the next bloke but....well, this was a bit weird. All sorts of talk about stuff that just wasn't possible - unless God had actually come to town. Like that was going to happen.

So, I knock off work and walk over to Stevo's. Hadn't seen him for days and I was feeling a bit rubbish about myself because of that. I never knew what to say. I always felt...I don't know...kind of uncomfortable around him those days. But I knew he liked it when we dropped by. Sometimes he'd ask about my day, and he didn't seem to mind that I just rambled on. Better than nothing I suppose. Which is what he had. Nothing.

We were just sitting there when his mum comes in and starts crying and talking and begging me to take him to this Jesus bloke. She says that he's going to heal him and make him well. Says he's been doing it everywhere and that God has sent him here for Stevo. I said that I didn't think this Jesus actually knew about Stevo and she says - in no uncertain terms - to mind my manners and that God knows about Stevo, and God talks to Jesus and God told him about Stevo and that's why he's here. So, I ask why Jesus hasn't come over, if that's why he's here and...well, that wasn't the smartest question I've ever asked, and she goes into full meltdown mode, and I can't really understand what she's saying but I can tell she really wants me to get Stevo to Jesus.



I round up the lads. Phil and Matt are no problem, but Bart doesn't want to do it. He doesn't want to see Stevo. I tell him to man up and get a life and think about what Stevo's going through and how, if there's a one in a million chance of something good happening then he owes that to Stevo and...you get the picture. I guilt him into coming.

We carry Stevo on the stretcher. Bart's saying nothing. Stevo just looks scared. Phil's being practical. Matt's doing what he's told. I'm talking to fill the silence. When we get to the place where Jesus is at, it's mayhem. Twenty, thirty deep around the front of the house. No-one's letting us through. They're all here for something and that something doesn't make way for Stevo. We retreat. I think about Stevo's mum and I'm not happy.

Matt takes off. I think he's legged it and won't be back, but five minutes and he's yelling at us to pick up Stevo and follow his lead. He takes us around the back of the house where nobody's waiting. No doors, no windows, no point. I seriously want to whack him. Then he points at the roof, and I don't want to whack him anymore. I want to kiss him. But I don't. Of course I don't!



It wasn't easy getting Stevo up onto the roof. It wasn't easy making a hole in that roof. It was really embarrassing when we all stuck our heads through the hole, and we see Jesus all covered in dust from the mess we'd made and everyone else looking at us like we'd taken a piss in the temple sanctuary. I knew we'd cop it tomorrow. But we hadn't come for us, and whatever happened tomorrow was tomorrow's business.

We had ropes and we started to lower Stevo into the room. It had gone super quiet. The Jesus bloke - I knew it was him because he was the only one there who looked even vaguely like he knew what was going on - just watched. Stevo was terrified. There was nothing he could do, and we were taking the tiniest bit of dignity he had left and throwing him to the wolves. He was crying again, and I felt like a dog.

We lowered him as gently as we could onto the ground, then we just hung over the whole gathering, our ugly mugs sticking through the ceiling. And Jesus looks at Stevo. And Stevo looks at Jesus. Probably just a few seconds but it felt like eternity.

Then Jesus kneels down next to him and says, 'Friend, your sins are forgiven you.' That's all. Nothing else. And I think that Stevo's mum's not going to be real happy about that. I can see us taking him home and saying, 'It's all good Mrs Stevo, he's still totally wrecked but his sins are forgiven'. That was going to go well. Not that Stevo doesn't have a few things that need forgiving. Like the time he told Matt's sister, Miriam, that I wanted to marry her - when we were 9!! Idiot. And...well...a few other things too. But who doesn't?

I was just telling the boys to start hoisting him up when someone speaks up. The place was full of the religious men, not just from our town but all sorts I'd never seen. Important looking men who were looking at us as if we were dirt. To be fair, they were looking at Jesus like that too. Anyway, this bloke says, 'Who is this who is speaking blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?', and there's a whole lot of murmurings of agreement. Like they wanted to make Jesus look stupid.

But Jesus didn't even bat an eyelid. He comes straight back at them, 'Why do you raise such questions in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, "Your sins are forgiven you", or to say, "Stand up and walk"? But so that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins, I say to you, stand up and take your bed and go to your home.'

And I was so angry at him. At Jesus. It was my fault Stevo was there, but he was just making fun of him now. Yeah mate, get up and walk. Why not?

Then I looked at Stevo, and there was this weird gleam in his eyes. Not tears. Not anything I'd ever seen before. And we watched him get up. And we watched him pick up that stretcher. And we watched him look Jesus in the eye, and nod, and walk out through a crowd that just dissolved in front of him. Then I couldn't see anything anymore, because I was crying too hard. Not just me either. All of us, raining tears on all those important religious blokes, and not being able to stop.



REFLECT:

What are your responses to the story? How does the story change, seeing the situation from the perspective of the friends? Are there things you have understood about the character, or the encounter, that were not in your thinking before? What is your emotional response? Are there things that make you angry? Or sad? Or happy? Or.....? Does this imaginative retelling ring true to you? Why? Why not?

QUOTE:

“Dear Child of God, I write these words because we all experience sadness, we all come at times to despair, and we all lose hope that the suffering in our lives and in the world will ever end. I want to share with you my faith and my understanding that this suffering can be transformed and redeemed. There is no such thing as a totally hopeless case. Our God is an expert at dealing with chaos, with brokenness, with all the worst that we can imagine. God created order out of disorder, cosmos out of chaos, and God can do so always, can do so now - in our personal lives and in our lives as nations, globally. ... Indeed, God is transforming the world now - through us - because God loves us.”

Desmond Tutu¹

AN ABM RESPONSE:

Much of ABM and AID's work is centred on justice-based, practical outcomes that respond to the needs expressed by communities round the world. That being said, our Church to Church program continues to support theological training, mentoring and discovery in PNG, Africa and Australia. Of huge importance to the church is the work being done by indigenous people around the country as they help us to understand the heart of reconciliation, the long history of God with their peoples prior to white invasion, and how we might truly come to worship God in a way that recognises and embraces 'country'. Forgiveness, reconciliation and the ongoing living out of the Gospel of inclusion continue to change, challenge and offer hope to the world.

1 God Has a Dream: A Vision of Hope for Our Time, Doubleday, 2004.

DISCUSS:

Stories of miraculous healings are as wonderful as they are rare. The joy of healing is very real, and it is not our place to stand in the way of what God does – or to direct it. But these stories can also be used as vehicles of unspeakable damage. Huge numbers of people have been shamed, blamed and abused because they have not been able to claim a miraculous healing. They have been told that they ‘didn’t pray hard enough’, or that they, ‘obviously don’t really believe’. Or they have been cruelly shunned because those who prayed for them feel badly that their prayers were inadequate. This type of behaviour is a form of spiritual abuse and must be called out for what it is. There is nothing loving about blaming someone for not being healed. There is nothing admirable about failing to see the incredible courage, strength, and faith of those who live with their brokenness and remain both hopeful and resilient.

Our lived experience tells us that miracles can happen, but they are not ours to control. Our lived experience tells us that pain is a reality many of us have no choice but to live with. So, what is going on here? If the healings are ‘signs’ of the broader work of the kingdom, what can we take away?

In this wonderful but strange encounter, even Jesus fails to act in the way we might expect. A paralysed man is let down through the ceiling and Jesus resolutely forgives his sins. Doesn’t heal him. Not then. Not at first. Not even with his friends looking down, after some heroic work to get him there. Instead of a round of applause from the watching religious leaders, there’s a swift accusation of blasphemy. And then the blinding light. The sign. Jesus explains that the miracle has already occurred but that they neither saw it nor understood it. It is, in fact, completely unacceptable to the religious leaders who have come to listen to Jesus. The miracle is that the ‘Stevo’ of our story did walk away, but he walked away healed. Forgiven. That’s the commonplace miracle that we so often ignore.

The church and the world are full of people just like us. Like Matt and Bart and Phil and Mark. Like Jane and Clare and Sasha and Anna. We

carry around a deep sense of inadequacy before God. Many of us carry secret hurts and guilts. Many of us have regrets that cripple us and infect every new relationship we attempt. And each morning we are offered the commonplace miracle of forgiveness. If only we can hear and understand.

The crowd will always want clear and practical outcomes. But the crowd is made up of individuals who all need forgiveness. Because – and we know this at the very deepest level – forgiveness frees us, in mind, body and soul, to become whole and human and hopeful again. Forgiveness opens the door that can allow us back to ourselves and our families and our communities because we are no longer ashamed, and we no longer feel judged. It is not always a straightforward path in every case and – like other miracles – forgiveness can and must never be forced or coerced. Freely and wholeheartedly given, it is the seed of resurrected hope.

Forgiveness may also lead us back, fuelled by gratitude and trust, into the arms of God. Forgiveness ‘heals’. And that is why we continue to proclaim the Gospel and to offer to a cynical world, and an uncertain church, the message of transformational love.

The message of forgiveness is the greatest gift – and the most ordinary miracle – the church has to offer. It can even be given when it has not been requested – as Jesus does in this story – because the act of forgiveness can potentially free both parties involved, giver and receiver. It allows for new beginnings. The message – the offer – of forgiveness remains a living testament of God’s profligate, irrational, mysterious, generous and wholehearted willingness to welcome God’s children – and all of God’s creation – back into the fullness of eternal oneness.





QUESTIONS:

1. INDIVIDUAL

- Without telling others what forgiveness is, share what the results of forgiveness (or the lack of it) has meant in your own life.
- Why might it be difficult to forgive?
- Is a sense of God's forgiveness real to you? Why? Why not?

2. COMMUNITY

- In which areas of our community life might the message of forgiveness help heal long-standing wounds and fissures?
- Where might our community seek forgiveness and where might we offer it?

3. CHURCH

- Do you think that we place much emphasis on the message and offer of forgiveness in our worship and shared life? Why? Why not?
- Where might our church seek forgiveness and where might we offer it?

SAMPLE





ADDITIONAL CREATIVE RESOURCES

Song: **The Porter's Gate - Little Things With Great Love**

Google it or go to: <https://youtu.be/pm5VQAxdMrc>

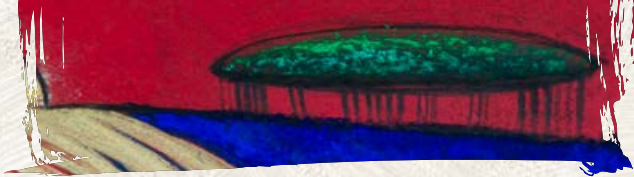
The Porter's Gate is a collective of fifty-plus songwriters, musicians, scholars, pastors, and music industry professionals from a variety of Christian worship traditions and cultural backgrounds, making music for churches.

Poetry or Prose: **Father, Forgive** by *Malcolm Guite*²

Father forgive, and so forgiveness flows;
Flows from the very wound our hatred makes,
Flows through the taunts, the curses and the blows,
Flows through our wasted world, a healing spring,
Welling and cleansing, washing all the marks
Away, the scores and scars of every wrong.

Forgiveness flows to where we need it most:
Right in the pit and smithy of our sin,
Just where the dreadful nails are driven in,
Just where our woundedness has done its worst.
We know your cry of pain should be a curse,
Yet turn to you and find we have been blessed.
We know not what we do, but Heaven knows
For every sin on earth, forgiveness flows.

2 From *Parable & Paradox* (pg69) by Malcolm Guite, Canterbury Press (2016)
<https://malcolmguite.wordpress.com/>



LAZARUS RAISED: LUKE 8:26-40 (MARTHA'S PERSPECTIVE)

Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Mary was the one who anointed the Lord with perfume and wiped his feet with her hair; her brother Lazarus was ill. So the sisters sent a message to Jesus, 'Lord, he whom you love is ill.' But when Jesus heard it, he said, 'This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God's glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.' Accordingly, though Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus, after having heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was.

Then after this he said to the disciples, 'Let us go to Judea again.' The disciples said to him, 'Rabbi, the Jews were just now trying to stone you, and are you going there again?' Jesus answered, 'Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Those who walk during the day do not stumble, because they see the light of this world. But those who walk at night stumble, because the light is not in them.' After saying this, he told them, 'Our friend Lazarus has

fallen asleep, but I am going there to awaken him.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will be all right.' Jesus, however, had been speaking about his death, but they thought that he was referring merely to sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead. For your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him.' Thomas, who was called the Twin, said to his fellow-disciples, 'Let us also go, that we may die with him.'

When Jesus arrived, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, some two miles away, and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them about their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, while Mary stayed at home. Martha said to Jesus, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of him.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to him,

'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' She said to him, 'Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world.'

When she had said this, she went back and called her sister Mary, and told her privately, 'The Teacher is here and is calling for you.' And when she heard it, she got up quickly and went to him. Now Jesus had not yet come to the village, but was still at the place where Martha had met him. The Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary get up quickly and go out. They followed her because they thought that she was going to the tomb to weep there. When Mary came where Jesus was and saw him, she knelt at his feet and said to him, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her also weeping, he was greatly disturbed in spirit and deeply moved. He said, 'Where have you laid him?' They said to him, 'Lord, come and see.' Jesus began to weep. So the Jews said, 'See how he loved him!' But some of them

said, 'Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying?'

Then Jesus, again greatly disturbed, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone was lying against it. Jesus said, 'Take away the stone.' Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, 'Lord, already there is a stench because he has been dead for four days.' Jesus said to her, 'Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?' So they took away the stone. And Jesus looked upwards and said, 'Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.' When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, 'Lazarus, come out!' The dead man came out, his hands and feet bound with strips of cloth, and his face wrapped in a cloth. Jesus said to them, 'Unbind him, and let him go.'

Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what Jesus did, believed in him.



STUDY 6

MY BROTHER

He was dead, and he is alive again. That's two now. Both of my favourite men.

Of course, Lazarus – my brother – was first, but both were traumatic. Days of waiting, fearing the worst. Hoping against hope. Giving up. Rewriting our world and then having to scratch that all out and begin a new reality.

Lazarus was born long after Mary and me. Our mother was too old. The birth was difficult. We lost her and we got Lazarus. She would have been happy that he made it. She'd always wanted a son.

From the start, he struggled. He was small and weak at first, but soon he gained strength, the wet-nurse shepherding him through those early months. Then he was slow to walk, and slower to talk, and we began to see who he would become. Not what. Who. Right from the start, he was – and remains – the happiest, most loving, kindest man I've ever known. Mary and I love him for all he's done for us. Our little brother. The head of our house.

Our father did not live many years after the birth. Just long enough to make it clear how disappointed he was. Lazarus was not the son he wanted. I'm not sure he ever held him again, after it became clear. Lazarus would never grow up to be like other men. People said he was afflicted, broken, wrong. We said he was blessed. Our father would not see the blessing. He died, angry with God – and with himself. He was not a bad man. He simply couldn't see the gift. Lazarus, of course, inherited everything. He was the man. Or, at that stage, the boy. Mary and I became his guides – and he, our protector. He gave us our lives.

Lazarus learnt to run and dance and sing. He was not treated well by some children, but he never held a grudge. Adults who weren't scared of him, loved him. He was gentle with animals. He learned some words and he attended the synagogue. His faith in God was always strong. He did not insist that Mary and I marry. I doubt he even thought about it, so we did not. We ran his household, as many women run many households. Not everyone was happy with the arrangement, but we didn't care.

The first time Jesus came through Bethany, we took Lazarus to see him. It was big news. The moment Lazarus saw Jesus, he changed. He simply stopped dead and stared. Then he walked through the crowd until he was toe to toe with Jesus. The laughing began, of course. The cat-calls. Then Lazarus spoke.

"I know you, Jesus", he said. And Jesus replied, "And I know you, Lazarus". Then they embraced, as if they were brothers, and Lazarus took his hand and led him to us. Again, he spoke, "This is my friend, Jesus. He will stay with us". It remains the closest he has ever come to demanding anything. That's when it began. Jesus always stayed with us. The uncharitable and the gossips always said it was because of Mary and me, but that's not true. I like to think he always wanted to see us too. I know he did. But he always came to see Lazarus. They would walk and play and sing together. No-one else could get Jesus to relax so much. They loved each other. We loved Jesus because he loved our brother. Before we believed in him, we loved him.

Jesus saw exactly what we saw. No, that's not true. Jesus saw even more than we could see. In Lazarus he met someone pure of heart and full of the wonder of God. He always spoke to Lazarus as if he were the equal of anyone. They would talk long into the night. He did not speak down to him. He never left him out. Where Jesus was, when he was with us, there was Lazarus. If anyone dared to call Lazarus 'simple' in the presence of Jesus, he would stop, eyeball them, and reply, "There is nothing simple about the capacity to love. You do not know my brother, Lazarus, and, if you do not know him, you cannot know me".

And then he died. Our brother, Lazarus, became ill. We were not worried. He was robust. He got worse. We prayed. We sent word to Jesus. We were so very scared. For our brother but also for ourselves. The vultures in our family began to circle. Everything would be lost. Lazarus lay down and could not get up. We told him Jesus was coming. That cheeky grin! Then the grimace of pain. He could not breathe. We begged him to wait for Jesus. Where was Jesus!? Lazarus died.

We buried him. We wept. We waited. Two women with no protector.
Four days.

Four days!

I met Jesus some distance from our house. I had gone to meet him as soon as I heard he was near. Mary would not come. She was so angry. She screamed and she wept, and she would not come with me. I sometimes feel that I cannot say or do what I feel, that Mary takes all that space in our family and I have to be the one who hangs together. But that day.....that day I was angry too. I was shattered and furious and sad and I was hopeless. I meant to shout at him and berate him. I meant to make him feel some of the despair that I had been feeling all these days.

When I saw him, he was already weeping. People say he only wept when Mary wept, but that's not true. He ran to me, and just as I was about to open my mouth, he opened his arms and we cried into each other's hair.



“If you had been here.”

“Do you believe?”

“I do.”

I ran back to get Mary, told her Jesus wanted to see her. I could not keep pace with her. When I got there, she was on the ground at his feet and there were more tears. She had not been quiet. Still, she repeated, “If you had been here”. Over and over. He looked broken.

At the tomb he was like a madman. “Take away the stone. Take away the stone!!”

I begged him not to shame us. Not to show his weakness to the crowd. They were not all friends. They never were. I told him there would be a smell. I told him it was too late. I said things I didn’t want to say. I denied what I believed. I feared the resurrection. None of us were rational. We were stricken. We wept.

“Did I not tell you that if you believed, you would see the glory of God?”, he yelled.

We took away the stone.

And Jesus looked upwards and cried, so that everyone heard him.

“Father, I thank you for having heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I have said this for the sake of the crowd standing here, so that they may believe that you sent me.’

When he had said this, he cried with a loud voice, he cried with all the rage against death that we had felt, with all the grief that burnt our hearts, with all the pain of loss, “Lazarus, come out!”

They say time stands still. It did then. There was a hush such as I have never heard before. As if all breath had stopped, in our lungs and in the whole world. Nothing happened. The mouth of the tomb gaped, a demon’s maw, set to laugh in scorn.

Then, small scrabbling sounds. Shuffling. People screamed. Some fainted. Lazarus appeared, trying to walk, wrapped in grave cloths. Jesus

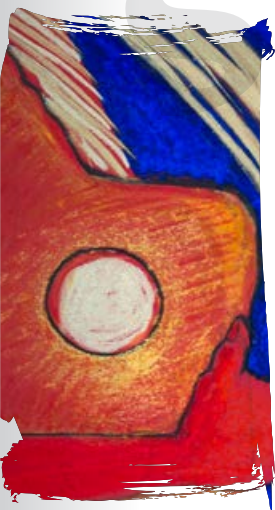
stepped forward and took the cloth from his face. That cheeky grin. They unbound him. They let him go. He went straight to Jesus, and they held each other as the crowd slipped away. It was a holy moment. You could not watch.

Lazarus took our arms, Mary and me, and we walked home. We bathed him and dressed him.

At dinner, Jesus spoke quietly with him while we sat in awe and wonder. By morning, Lazarus was back feeding the goats with Mary. That's the oddest thing about miracles, they come and go as if nothing has happened. And yet....

Later, when we had to tell Lazarus that they had killed Jesus, he went back to his tomb and he would not come home for three days. When the news came that the disciples had seen him alive again, we ran to tell him. As we got close, we saw him laughing with someone. We knew, immediately, who it was. We left them to talk.

We believed.



REFLECT:

What are your responses to the story? How does the story change, seeing the situation from the perspective of Martha? Are there things you have understood about the character, or the encounter, that were not in your thinking before? What is your emotional response? Are there things that make you angry? Or sad? Or happy? Or.....? Does this imaginative retelling ring true to you? Why? Why not?

QUOTE:

"If creation is good, as Genesis 1 repeatedly claims, then disability is good. This linkage is most pointed in genetic disability, which is not a result of a breakdown in the created order (a fall), but of nature's creative capacity. From single-celled organisms through to the unfathomable diversity of species that have thrived (and gone extinct) during Earth's history, the wonders of the natural world are a consequence of genetic variability, of so-called "mutations" that drive the process of evolution and its remarkable adaptivity. These same life-giving processes also generate disability. The paradox of life is that potency and vulnerability go together. Because this is so, far from being a consequence of sin, disability is a good, a symbol of potent, creative, beauty, a testimony to the generativity and limits of nature."

Professor Shane Clifton¹

AN ABM RESPONSE:

In communities where survival is the main goal, where poverty exists as an everyday reality, the disabled are often those who suffer the most. ABM is humbled by the incredible work done by our Partners around the world, as they support and encourage local people who have a heart to respect and work with people living with disabilities as they take agency within their own communities. ABM has proudly supported projects in the Philippines and Kenya, among others. It is through the lens of the Gospel that we are able to recognise God's unique gifting in each and every person – and to recognise, own and embrace our own disabilities.

1 From: Crippling Christian Theology as I Power My Wheelchair Out the Door, Theology Today 2020, Vol. 77(2) 124–137
<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/crippling-christian-theology-disability-faith-and-doubt/12952958>
Shane is Honorary Associate of the Centre for Disability Research and Policy at the University of Sydney. His research interests explore the intersection of disability, virtue ethics, and spirituality/theology. Shane, after an accident in 2010, lives with quadriplegia and has been working with the research team for the Australian Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation against People with Disability. You can find him at Shaneclifton.com

DISCUSS:

Lazarus is one of the most mysterious characters in the Gospels. If he was the 'man' of the house, why is it Mary and Martha who seem to feature most in the stories? Why does he not have any recorded interactions with Jesus, apart from being raised from the dead? And why did Jesus love him so much? Again, we often tend not to interrogate the scripture in the way we might do with other texts. In a highly patriarchal society, how do we explain the fact that the women are running the place!?

There have been many ideas put forward over the centuries and the one I have run with here is not unique. The L'Arche Community has explored this idea as they have worked with the scriptures in community with disabled adults. Central to the idea is that each person is differently gifted and that we need to view each other through the eyes of love (the Gospel 'lens') in order to see the gift each person brings to the world.



Painting: Loved Brothers 1, 2023



It is a dangerous fallacy to suggest that the Christian faith – following the way of Jesus – can only be done effectively by those with sufficiently rigorous, academic study of theology. Many people are often infantilised or made to feel inferior if they have not mastered the language of faith or the full scope of the scriptures. Leadership is almost never offered to those who exhibit incredible and tangible levels of faith – unless they have a degree! But the people Jesus spoke to – the people he chose as his disciples – as he travelled around were, like most of us, ordinary folk. Many were probably illiterate. Certainly, they will have been more religiously focussed, as they were part of a community for whom religious identity was crucial. Yet, they were certainly the same mix of passionate and indifferent, educated and ignorant, spiritual and profane as most communities are.

Sometimes we meet people and are amazed by what we might call, their ‘simple’ faith. Better words can be, ‘trusting’, ‘deep’, ‘inarticulate’ or ‘profound’. Many of us come to this sort of faith as children and we then have to survive our theological and ecclesial education, trying to keep the core of that primal faith intact.

The work of mission is never to try and make sure everyone gets the faith ‘right’. The work of mission is to view one another through the Gospel ‘lens’ of love, and then live and act in ways that reveal the love of God for all people. Many people never respond to propositions about the faith, but do respond to the revealed person of Jesus, translated through the love of those who love him. Each of us, at our best, becomes a window through which others glimpse the divine. We are the body of Christ.



QUESTIONS:

1. INDIVIDUAL

- Where did your faith come from? Was it learned from books or picked up from people of faith?
- Can you recollect a person in whom you saw (or see) great and deep faith? What did/do you see?

2. COMMUNITY

- At what level do you think our society respects the rights and gifting of the disabled?
- Do you feel that your community provides access and amenities to people living with disability to allow them to fully participate in society? If not, what might be our responsibility?

3. CHURCH

- What can we do in our own church communities to break down the walls of awkwardness that can get in the way of us genuinely connecting with (and including) those who are 'different' from us? Have you ever managed to do this as an individual or within a group?
- How might we learn to view people living with disability through the Gospel 'lens' without being patronising?

SAMPLE





ADDITIONAL CREATIVE RESOURCES

Song: **All My Favourite People Are Broken -
Over The Rhine**

Google it or go to: <https://youtu.be/7Ea9uy6Mngk>

Over the Rhine is an American, Ohio-based folk music band, the core of which is the husband-and-wife team of pianist/guitarist/bassist Linford Detweiler and vocalist/guitarist Karin Bergquist.

Poetry or Prose: ***Angel* by Terri Kirby Erickson²**

I used to see them walking, a middle-aged man and his grown son, both wearing brown trousers and white shirts like boys in a club, or guys who like to simplify. But anyone could see the son would never be a man who walked without a hand to hold, a voice telling him what to do. So the father held his son's hand and whispered whatever it was the boy needed to know, in tones so soft and low it might have been the sound of wings pressing together again and again. Maybe it was that sound, since the father had the look of an angel about him, or what we imagine angels should be – a bit solemn-faced, with eyes that view the world through a lens of kindness – who see everyone's son as beautiful and whole.

2 From, 'How to Love the World', Poems of Gratitude and Hope (pg21), edited by James Crews. Storey Publishing 2021

ABOUT US

ABM is the national mission agency for the Anglican Church of Australia. It is the channel through which Australian Anglicans participate in mission, both here and overseas. Through our Anglican church partners both in Australia and overseas, ABM's Church to Church program serves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Anglicans as well as theological education overseas.

Anglicans in Development (AID) operates our Sustainable Communities program. AID works with church partners to deliver grassroots, community-driven development, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, and disaster preparedness and response.

In all our work, we want to see people everywhere experience the wholeness of life God offers in Jesus Christ, and to this end we support our partners as they participate in God's mission.



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ADDITIONAL ABM RESOURCES

Available at: www.abmission.org/resources

Songs from a Strange Land

Beautiful words and images to take you from Advent to Epiphany with a particular emphasis on Indigenous Christianity, the Australian landscape and Creation theology. Available as an app or 158-page booklet.



Into the Desert

40 days of Scripture readings, reflections and prayers for Lent that take you on a spiritual journey into the Australian wilderness. Available as an app or an 88-page booklet.



Deep calls to Deep

A 46-day journey into the mystery of suffering that begins in Holy Week and ends on Ascension Day. Available as an app or download a free 148pg pdf.



Repairing the Breach

Examines what it means to be people of healing in a broken world. Includes seven studies that take you from Ash Wednesday to Palm Sunday. Available as a 110-page booklet.



Where do we go from here?

Missional Bible Studies based on the book of Acts. Enter into the great adventure of 'mission' in our own time and place. In Australia. Today. Available as an 88-page booklet.



Climate for Change

Urges people of faith and hope to become activists for a sustainable future. Our children and grandchildren will inherit the fruit of our decisions. Available as a 64-page booklet.



A Voice in the Wilderness:

Listening to the Statement from the Heart

A study to open up conversations about the theological response to the Statement from the Heart. Available as a free pdf or 120-page booklet.



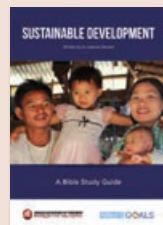
God was on Both sides of the Beach

A 5-part video study introducing the Anglican Church in the Torres Strait and the Coming of the Light, a largely unknown story but one that is important for us all to learn from.



Sustainable Development

A Bible Study guide to the Global Goals for Sustainable Development.



Free pdf, Leader's Guide or to purchase hard copies of this book:

www.abmission.org/resources/the-imaginary-doorway

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In any publication that comes from ABM, the most important acknowledgement is that of our Partners and the work they carry out in the communities they live in and love. ABM staff have had the opportunity to meet and befriend many people across the world. We have learnt much from our encounters with Christians living in challenging and culturally diverse environments. We have been gently guided towards a fuller understanding of what God is doing in the world and have been generously invited to participate. So, to all our Partners, past, present and future – thank you!

I also wish to acknowledge my ABM colleagues, people touched by a desire to help make the world a better place through love, hope and justice. It's an improbable outcome and an often-frustrating challenge, but they just get on with it. The 'now, but not yet' kingdom of God is built by people who dare to try, dare to dream, dare to act. You are admirable people.

One of the other things we learn as we travel, is that people's culture, language and context can differ vastly, but that humans are often motivated by very similar things. Family, community, love, hope, respect, kindness – and faith. The story of faith, the story of Jesus, has transposed itself into virtually every country and continent. Somehow, the very real and grounded story of a young Jewish Rabbi who we believe to be the Son of God, reaches into the lives, hearts and minds of people wherever it is told. That is the power of story.

The Gospel is a story. It began as a rumour shared between frightened but hopeful disciples and grew into an unstoppable wave of life-giving affirmation of all that God has made. It has been written down. But that's not the Gospel. It has been twisted and corrupted by some. But that's not the Gospel. It has been hijacked by principalities and powers. But that's not the Gospel. The Gospel is the story that, through the working of the Holy Spirit, has whispered words of liberation and love, rebellion and release, courage and compassion, into the hearts of billions. Stories change the world.

Vanessa and I have been telling and re-telling the Gospel story for most of our lives. We acknowledge all those who have taught us and told us stories, nurturing our doubt and our faith. Communities, parishes and friends. And we give thanks for our families – especially our children, who remind us that telling the story in never enough. It has to be lived.

Steve Daughtry 6-1-23

***“There’s always room for
a story that can transport
people to another place.”***

J.K. Rowling



Seven studies that take us into the lives of seven of the people Jesus brought to wholeness. Seven stories that bring scripture alive and help us to understand that Jesus was dealing with real people, rather than generic characters. Story-based, art-rich studies that will touch your heart, build your faith and encourage you on the missional journey. All genuine mission is incarnational and relationally based. As the studies suggest, "If our mission is all about purpose rather than relationship, we miss the point."

"I found the imaginative reflections on the gospel passages really powerful. The reflections gave me new insights into the experience people had with the life-giving love of Jesus, and I am sure the discussion starters will lead to rich conversation. I commend the Imaginary Doorway....and I am grateful to ABM-A for its provision."

Archbishop Geoff Smith, The Primate of the Anglican Church of Australia and Archbishop of Adelaide.

"Complimenting Vanessa's evocative images, Canon Steve takes the gift of human imagination seriously, inviting us to experience scripture in a new way - with the authentic potential for new revelation".

Archdeacon Sophie Relf-Christopher

"This study is a grace filled embodiment of the Gospel of love and inclusion. The exquisite artwork offers a profound partnership with the text, carrying us deep into the heart of God."

Bishop Denise Ferguson

"Steve brings these stories of encounters with Jesus vividly alive with his sharp and engaging prose, and Vanessa likewise with her striking artwork.....evocative and provocative, creative and thoughtful, engaging and down-to-earth. I recommend them highly for those seeking to reconnect with Jesus' life and practice of inclusion and generosity."

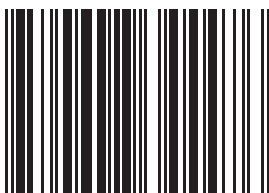
The Rev'd Assoc Prof Matthew Anstey

"As a friend and fellow-traveller, I very much recommend ABM's, 'The Imaginary Doorway'. Steve Daughtry, is a gifted storyteller who brings to life seven encounters that Jesus had with other people. Then there are thought provoking questions and quotes... and beautiful paintings by Vanessa Daughtry which take us into a reflective space without words."

The Rt Revd Cameron Venables, Archbishop's Commissary (Diocese of Brisbane), Bishop for the Western Region.



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