

Rolling away the stone.

by Robert Thompson

I've always felt that the year really hasn't got into full swing until I have experienced Easter. If there is any time of the year when I feel truly refreshed, it's the week after Easter. I think this mainly because Christmas and Easter are a nice holiday break from everything and those holidays involve a trip away or visits with friends, celebrations and making some new memories. This Easter was a little different but very rewarding as I travelled by myself to Perth as guest minister for Perth Easter Camp. Serpentine Campground is about an hour out of Perth nestled amongst a bushland setting and is home to kangaroos, kookaburras. I felt pretty special as I had a bonus with an echidna stationed at my front door.

Whilst Eastern Australia has been swimming in constant rain over several months, four thousand kilometres away on the west coast in Western Australia, it has received virtually no rain since last October so it is tinder dry and has been very hot and the threat of bushfires remain a constant concern. However, the weather and bushfire threats could not diminish the enthusiasm of the campers who were keen to gather for the annual Easter Reunion Camp hosted by Community of Christ's Perth Congregation.

The theme of our camp was taken from the book by Gary Chapman "The Language of Love", and I was blessed to lead three workshops using some of the insights from that book. We explored what our own "love language" was, and the languages of partners and close friends as well. If you are not familiar with the book it points to five areas, Physical touch; Quality time; Words of affirmation; Gift giving and Acts of service.

Our time together afforded us opportunity to share deeply with one another and discover more about ourselves and each other as we also touched on ways to handle conflict and difficult conversations. In the context of Easter and our journey with the Easter story every day, Easter became very real, through worship and sacraments, by sharing meals together, playing and creating things of beauty in our craft time and by telling our stories and sharing in song around our virtual campfire, new bonds of friendship and love were created. Existing friendships were reinforced and our connection to the divine was made real and for

myself I felt a renewal in my commitment and gained new insights and new understandings.

In my role as Transformation Minister, with the focus and desire to see Community of Christ thrive in the communities in which we live and serve, I find camping experiences such as Serpentine are at the very foundation of our church life.

Whilst visiting Perth I had the opportunity to visit the Beldon Centre. This is a church owned facility which is leased to a very progressive Childcare Centre. This facility helps to fund missions like the Food Pantry which I also was extremely impressed to see in operation. Scores of people frequent the Food Pantry every week, providing clothing, snacks, fellowship, vegetables and grocery items which help supplement those who are experiencing hardship, and if you love coffee like I do, the coffee van truly delivers.

To see people laughing and sharing with each other; cars pull over to buy a coffee and then sit and chat under the umbrellas; the smiling faces of the greeters and volunteers, to experience all this I must say I was very moved. This was an expression of tangible love, a gift to the community and a gift to those associated with Community of Christ to offer their services, skills and talents to act as volunteers in building community.

To top it off I was able to catch a snippet of the Community Choir that runs out of Community of Christ church hall at Woodlands. This choir of over 60 members is run by Geoff Robinson who is both the choir master and musical maestro.

We are very blessed to have leaders like Peter Lonsdale, Adrian O'Dea, Anita Staaden, Graeme & Helen Gidney (volunteer cooks), Sonia Overstone (Coordinator Perth Food Pantry) and Ken Robinson. With our powers combined, together we are rolling away the stone to breathe new life and opportunities into our communities. Well done Community of Christ Perth!

