



Photo - Ben Smith - Cape Scharnck

TOGETHER WE STAND

Cape Schanck is a rugged spot on the southern coast of the Mornington Peninsula. For thousands of years waves have crashed fiercely against its basalt cliffs, wearing them away to produce beaches of black sand and pebbles. Cliffs smothered in coastal banksia, tea tree and other coastal native, matting the seemingly impenetrable surface of the landscape, yet hiding a world beneath. Icy winds from Bass Strait push and pull this bushland in all directions, and the piercing sun scolds them in summer. Sections of cleared pastoral land dot between the national park, originally cleared to fuel the limestone kilns of the coast for the production of lime for the building of Melbourne. The green pastures, black cliffs, grey barked trees and the blue ocean provide a backdrop any artist dreams of.

We bought a block of land here in 2019 with the intention of building a home to live in. When analysing the land, we looked at the trees on the site to make sure they are stable and connect with the house (from a design perspective, hopefully not a physical one!) and in doing so I've learned something about our humanity. Tea tree are a beautiful, meandering tree which grow perfectly in our sandy soil. Growing between 5-15 metres in height, their life span is normally around 20-30 years. When they get to the end of their life, due to their top-heavy nature and the sandy soil they simply start leaning, then leaning some more, until a bit of a wind gust lands them on the ground. It's not often they'll fall in one foul swoop, and you don't often hear them fall at all like you would a gum tree. When they are surrounded by other trees (which is often the case) they stand longer, having protection and assistance to stay upright. It's rare that you'll see a lone tea tree standing in a field.

I feel as if humanity has a similar set of characteristics, especially when it comes to community. When we stand alone, all the forces of our society bear their weight upon us. Good and bad! In isolation, there is no one next to us to support when we're in sorrow, nor



to share our joy and happiness. I've experienced times when I arrive home expecting to see someone to be there, and you're really wanting to share exciting news, but they're all out. It's disheartening.

What we know about community and discipleship is that it helps us be the best versions of ourselves. When we're helping each other stay standing, when we're sheltering someone from the wind, when someone is there for you when you're out of energy, people help us live. It's where love is felt most strongly, and we know it's part of our core.

In our faith movement, congregations and other groups or experiences are our communities – they are places we have lived out our journey and continue to be places we hold dear. Their form is being examined right now, perhaps more than ever, especially in areas where our numbers are low and we are struggling to find ways to continue the valuable ministries we have offered and experienced for generations. When we're in that place, it can feel like we're alone, and the only ones going through it, like a solo tree in a field. But, as our sacred texts remind us constantly, we never stand alone. We must remind each other to lift our eyes to see that others are around us - in other congregations, across the seas, in our neighbourhoods - because our communities are not bound in four walls, they are shared across time and place through the Spirit. When we acknowledge that reality, we can lean on each other for support, finding more energy and sustenance for our journey ahead.

So, next week when we start clearing our pocket of land for our home, there will be no solo tea trees, rather, communities of trees which will be there to support each other through challenging climates. Because that's where they belong. May you be blessed by the trees of hope around you.

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