

RAISING WOMEN'S VOICES IN PREACHING THE GOSPEL

*in
her
voice*

AUSTRALIAN
WOMEN
PREACH


garratt
PUBLISHING



Published in Australia by
Garratt Publishing
32 Glenvale Crescent
Mulgrave, VIC 3170
www.garrattpublishing.com.au

Copyright in this work remains the property of the contributing authors.

Copyright © WATAC Inc. – Women and the Australian Church 2023
All rights reserved. Except as provided by the Australian copyright law, no part of this book may be reproduced in any way without permission in writing from the publisher.

Cover Design by Guy Holt
Text Design by Garratt Publishing
Edited by Juliette Hughes
Cover image © Sophie Cole, Lourde designer and founder
Artwork pp 1, 3 © Belinda Roberts, *Leaves on the Line*

Printed by Tingleman Printers

Unless otherwise noted, scripture quotations are drawn from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible, copyright © 1989 by the Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA.
(Used by permission. All rights reserved.)

ISBN 9781922484581

Cataloguing in Publication information for this title is available from the National Library of Australia.
www.nla.gov.au

The authors and publisher gratefully acknowledge the permission granted to reproduce the copyright material in this book. Every effort has been made to trace copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material.

The publisher apologises for any errors or omissions in the above list and would be grateful if notified of any corrections that should be incorporated in future reprints or editions of this book.



WATAC Inc.
Women and the Australian Church



THE GRAIL
IN AUSTRALIA

Contents

Welcome to Country	1
<i>DI LANGHAM & BELINDA ROBERTS</i>	

Preface.....	5
<i>ANDREA DEAN</i>	

Australian Women Preach: an introduction	7
<i>TRACY MCEWAN</i>	

The Journey: Advent to Resurrection

1. An Apocalyptic Invitation.....	11
Luke 21:25–36	
<i>KATECIA TAYLOR</i>	

2. Listening with the Ear of Our Hearts	15
Luke 1:39–45	
<i>RACY SALVACION ESPINO</i>	

3. Lifted Up	19
John 3:14–21	
<i>JACQUI RÉMOND</i>	

4. Coming Home	23
Luke 15:1–3, 11–32	
<i>MEL DWYER</i>	

5. Darkness and Light	27
John 20:19–31	
<i>MELINDA JOLLY</i>	

6. Feed My Sheep	31
John 21: 1–19	
<i>BETH DOHERTY</i>	

7. Love and Friendship	35
John 15:9–17	
<i>DANIELLE ANNE LYNCH</i>	

Tempus B

8. Jesus Calms the Storm.....	41
-------------------------------	----

Mark 4:35–41

ELIZABETH LEE

9. Jesus Invites a Woman to Preach	45
--	----

Mark 5:21–43

PATRICIA GEMMELL

10. Enough Bread Talk – I’m Outta Here!	49
---	----

John 6:60–69

CATHIE LAMBERT

11. Be Opened.....	53
--------------------	----

Mark 7:31–37

FIONA DYBALL

12. Original Love.....	57
------------------------	----

Mark 10:2–16

MARY COLOE

13. Through Jesus’ Eyes.....	61
------------------------------	----

Mark 12:38–44

MICHELE CONNOLLY

14. Staying the Course.....	65
-----------------------------	----

Mark 13:24–32

RADHIKA SUKUMAR-WHITE

Tempus C

15. Part of Who We Are.....	71
-----------------------------	----

Luke 3:15–16, 21–22

MONICA DUTTON

16 Getting Real and Getting On With It.....	75
---	----

Luke 6:39–45

KATE ENGLEBRECHT

17. Jesus Visits Martha and Mary.....79
Luke 10:38–42
 GEMMA THOMSON WITH REFLECTIONS FROM
 RILEY-JAYNE CARROLL & SAMARA SPADANUDA

18. What God Offers in Answer to Prayer83
Luke 11:1–13
 MOIRA BYRNE

19. Lighting Our Lamps and Standing With Those Who Have No Agency ...87
Luke 12:32–48
 CHRISTINE REDWOOD

20. ‘I come to bring division’91
Luke 12:49–53
 MICHELLE EASTWOOD

21. Gratitude97
Luke 17:11–19
 ANGELA MCCARTHY

Celebration

22. Christmas.....103
John 1:1–18
 ALISON OVEREEM

23. Knowing, Being, Doing and Valuing109
John 12:1, 12–13 • Luke 22:14
 RACHEL MCLEAN, JENNIFER KING,
 TAMILYN AH KEE & ASHLEIGH UNG

24. Celebration115
Mark 16:15–20
 ELIZABETH YOUNG

25. Empty Cross, Empty Tomb and Empty Space119
Luke 24:46–53
 PATRICIA THERESE BENEDICT THOMAS

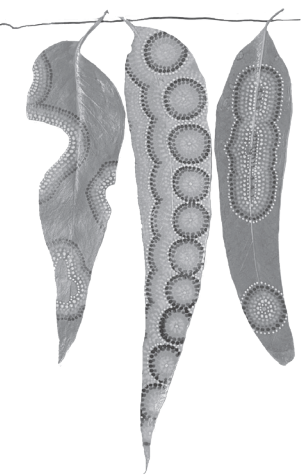
26. Trinity, Pentecost and Climate Change123
John 15:26–27; 16:12–15
DI RAYSON

27. St Mary of the Cross MacKillop129
Matthew 6:25–34
ANGELA MARQUIS

28. On the Side of Truth133
John 18: 33–37
DI LANGHAM

MEET THE AUTHORS137

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS149



Welcome to Country

Revelation 22:2

DI LANGHAM & BELINDA ROBERTS

**... and the leaves of the tree
were for the healing of the nations**

I am a Boandik woman living in the lands of the Awabakal. My family history is that of dislocation, cultural annihilation, destruction of our lands, banning of our language and traumatic racism that included belittling our people as though we were worthless and useless. My history is not any different to that of many Aboriginal people in this land – it has left many scars.

In my community the women meet each week to paint gum leaves. They are dot-arted and placed in containers for families for Sorry Business and as gifts to family members. The leaves are collected, pressed and painted. They are then pressed again ready for distribution. We are an art therapy group, and the leaves not only look beautiful, but smell and feel beautiful as well.

... and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations...

My daughter, Belinda, wrote the following words after dreaming she was at an art show with our leaves being pegged onto a clothesline.

'The tempest is an old-style clothesline with two long rows.
The ends are wood.
Pegged on the lines are my leaves.
I say we are here.
This is what's left.
We have been laundered, white-washed and hung out to dry.
Wood suspends us but they are not our trees.
Even the trees are off country.
We are not left out the front.
We are left out the back in the yard scattered,
needed but not considered.
We have our culture in small pieces,
fragments of an ancient rainforest
that is without canopy or roots.
Just left tormented by the sun and disconnected to the earth.
We are the leaves
We are the holes
We are the imperfections
We are the ochre and we are the artwork, untied, living,
holding the broken songlines.
We are different in size and shape and colour and form.
We are treated the same, we are tethered, hardened and left over time.
No smokings.
The cleanse came with the water,
polluted, white, soapy and unforgiving,
expected everything to make everything the same.
Us leaves left hanging out to dry.
Are we all supposed to be the same?
We are the women.
We are the grandmas.
We were taught to do the washing.
We are the ones hanging the leaves now.
When did we learn to do it ourselves?
When did we choose?
We need the washing now.
How else can we stay together?
We need those lines, that grid,

that way to live on a cycle that's foreign
in trees that aren't trees
on land we can only feel the stories of and listen to.

I am so sad that we are the caretakers now.

Why is our land so broken it needs us to separate
and hold ourselves in power and ownership
to decide its fate?

Why are we making choices for our land? We are not colonists.

We can't make that timber holding the lines grow roots.

Our ancestors are in that wood, in those trees,
in those buildings, in those churches.

We aren't and our leaves aren't.

People look at Jesus on the cross.

I see the nails driven into the trusses that hold up the roof.

I see all the nails in the roof in our ancestors
that protect us, shelter us.

We aren't so different and yet we are not the same.

What space is ours for our culture?

The backyard?

The church?

Is it in the language?

I don't speak it,

I feel it in me.

I am left out to dry.'

... and the leaves of the trees were for the healing of the nations...

Our leaves are for the healing of our nations. Our women paint them. We gift them. We use them for Sorry Business. Our smoking ceremonies use the leaves to heal and cleanse. The eucalyptus is a healing ingredient in all we do, and it comes from leaves.

In the beginning of the Bible, we have Genesis; we have the tree of life; and in the end of the Bible we have the tree of life in Revelation. Both have leaves. The leaves are the healing of nations. All nations.



sample

Preface

I'm proud to be president of WATAC Inc. (Women and the Australian Church) – one of the co-sponsors of the Australian Women Preach project. WATAC is an ecumenical organisation formed in 1983 by women and men of Catholic religious congregations to enable and advocate for a greater role for women in decision-making, ministry and leadership. Since that time, little significant progress has been made for women in the Catholic Church; although there have been occasional positives, such as the opening of the ministries of reader and acolyte to women.

Through initiatives such as Australian Women Preach, WATAC no longer waits for the Church to act, but seeks to model the Church we want to be: inclusive, diverse and welcoming. Our sisters from diverse Christian denominations have joined together, even when they can preach in their own churches. I am deeply grateful for their generous and inspiring homilies and for their solidarity.

On a personal level, the opportunity to contribute to Australian Women Preach was a challenge, but a delightful one. As I understand it, preparing a homily isn't meant to be easy. It is not a report. It is meant to involve a struggle with the text to break open the meaning. And not just any meaning – the meaning must be relevant to the experience of the community.

It costs me something to prepare a homily. I research, I harvest interpretations from scholars, I sit with the text, I wait for the gift or entry point in the text to emerge. As I invest myself in the task, the text begins to matter to me like never before.

Mary Oliver, a poet, uses the term 'to listen convivially' to describe this early stage of writing, where one is present and 'attending', warmly and openly, to the environment.

As the homily emerges, I try to balance genuine body or substance with a sincere, authentic voice with a spiritual purpose. The homily

needs both continuity and uniqueness, grounded in the tradition of the Christian community and expressed with a fresh perspective.

Each time I write a homily it is like going on retreat. I review where I am in my spiritual life. I recentre myself on what is important. I grapple with the challenge of the text before I share it with you, my spiritual community. It matters to me that there is a community that invites me and permits me to witness to God's action in my life in this way.

Christian women are skilled at witnessing generously and faithfully to God in all kinds of contexts; they are missionaries, family members, professors, carers, authors, benefactors, contemplatives, mentors, advocates and so forth. But in some churches, including the Catholic Church, an insufficient range of voices is heard preaching at Eucharist. Women can preach but are not permitted to do so. Until that changes, I'm supporting Australian Women Preach, and I hope you will too.

***Andrea Dean,
President, WATAC Inc. – Women and the Australian Church***

Australian Women Preach: an introduction

In late 2020 I received a phone call from Patricia Gemmell. Patricia explained that she had been awake well into the early hours of the morning pondering an idea: ‘Could we create a podcast of Australian women preaching?’

The Holy Spirit moves in remarkable ways. As Patricia lay awake that morning, the Catholic Church in Australia was in the midst of a journey towards its fifth Plenary Council. The first phase of Listening and Dialogue was complete and the six Discernment Papers that were the fruit of the second phase of Listening and Discernment had been published. In the papers, written by small groups tasked with discerning the voice of the Spirit, all but one made strong statements about the importance of changing church culture to give women a much greater role in the Catholic Church. These papers identified the gifts that women could bring to governance, leadership, and decision-making, as well as pastoral and liturgical ministry within the Church.

At each step of the Plenary Council journey, Australian Catholics had been encouraged to continue discerning. It was in this spirit that Patricia and I spoke about the possibility of a podcast. We were inspired and emboldened by the recommendation made in one of the Discernment Papers, *Prayerful and Eucharistic*, to ‘provide formal approval and encouragement for suitably qualified lay women and men to break open the Word’.

Initially, the task of creating a podcast seemed overwhelming. From our initial conversation we put the call out to the networks of WATAC (Women in the Australian Church) and The Grail in Australia. In response a small group of women gathered and the team behind Australian Women Preach was born: Patricia, Rebecca Beisler,

Elizabeth Lee, Angela Marquis, Colleen Rowe, Philippa Wicksey, Andrea Dean, and me, with Louise Maher as podcast producer.

Australian Women Preach was launched on International Women's Day, 8 March 2021, as a weekly podcast featuring Australian women preaching the Sunday Gospel. It was initially programmed to run for 30 weeks in the lead-up into the first assembly of the Plenary Council. However, two years later, the podcast continues to showcase the theological and preaching talent of Australian women.

It is with much excitement and anticipation that the Australian Women Preach podcast team brings you this book of reflections. First and foremost – through the podcast, and now this volume – we seek to raise women's voices and highlight the preaching talent of women. Inclusiveness and diversity are important, and the women who are featured in this volume come, so far as possible, from different Christian denominations, generations, backgrounds, cultures, and geographical locations. They all share a knowledge and love of the Gospel, and a Spirit-given desire to preach.

The Plenary Council presented the Catholic Church in Australia with an opportunity to listen and raise up the voices, wisdom, and insight of women. Unfortunately, during the final assembly the motion that would have instigated a process of change towards Catholic women preaching the homily during Sunday Mass was not passed. The Australian Women Preach podcast, and now this book, are providing platforms where women's voices can be heard outside rigid ecclesial structures.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 12 that, in building up the Body of Christ, we are all called to discern our particular gifts and to use them for the good of all. Many Christian denominations embrace the gifts of women in ministry, and their faith communities are privileged to regularly hear these women preaching. We intentionally bring you their reflections alongside the words of women who are yet to be given permission to preach in their churches. We hope that you will be empowered by all these women as they give testament to the wonderful riches that can flow when women are allowed to preach.

***Dr Tracy McEwan,
On behalf of the Australian Women Preach team***

*The Journey:
Advent to Resurrection*

sample

An Apocalyptic Invitation

Luke 21:25–36

KATECIA TAYLOR

²⁵ “There will be signs in the sun, the moon, and the stars, and on the earth distress among nations confused by the roaring of the sea and the waves. ²⁶ People will faint from fear and foreboding of what is coming upon the world, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken. ²⁷ Then they will see “the Son of Man coming in a cloud” with power and great glory. ²⁸ Now when these things begin to take place, stand up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near.”

²⁹ Then he told them a parable: ‘Look at the fig tree and all the trees; ³⁰ as soon as they sprout leaves you can see for yourselves and know that summer is already near. ³¹ So also, when you see these things taking place, you know that the kingdom of God is near. ³² Truly I tell you, this generation will not pass away until all things have taken place. ³³ Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

³⁴ ‘Be on guard so that your hearts are not weighed down with dissipation and drunkenness and the worries of this life, and that day does not catch you unexpectedly, ³⁵ like a trap. For it will come upon all who live on the face of the whole earth. ³⁶ Be alert at all times, praying that you may have the strength to escape all these things that will take place, and to stand before the Son of Man.’

I wonder what thoughts and feelings ran through your mind as you read this passage. It is a passage that can bring forth all kinds of emotions: from fear and confusion to comfort and hope.

I groaned when I read this passage, knowing I had to write a sermon on it, the one you are now reading. I wished for a simpler passage for the first week of Advent, some passage with some nice Wise Men, or angels singing to shepherds. Instead, this passage has wild imagery, violence and Jesus coming in on clouds.

However, as I sat with this text, read it repeatedly, looked to voices wiser than my own and wrestled and prayed with the text, I began to appreciate the opportunity to preach on it.

This passage of Luke falls into a genre we call ‘apocalyptic.’ What does that mean? Perhaps when we think of the apocalypse, we fear impending doom caused by climate change, or imagine big blockbuster movies. Perhaps the thing I am most certain of is that this genre of texts is a mystery.

Some folks say they have them all figured out. Many a cult has started around people who have cracked apocalyptic books, like supposed secret codes hidden in the Book of Revelation. Unfortunately, or fortunately, I have no secret code figured out. This short sermon cannot possibly provide you with all the answers to the questions this passage raises. Perhaps it may leave you with more questions than when you began.

I invite you to meet me in this mystery, because there I think God is. ‘Apocalypse’ in the Greek means, ‘unveiling’ or ‘uncovering.’ Let us see what we can uncover.

Nowadays, the apocalyptic genre, like this passage, is not super-popular, as are modern apocalyptic films, books and games. But this isn’t that type of apocalyptic text. Apocalyptic texts talk about God coming down; they use imagery that is strange and needs interpreting or uncovering.

These writings were written in crisis situations – in exile or under oppressive foreign occupation. Whenever we look at apocalyptic texts, I think it is important for us to realise they are written by those without a lot of power in society, not the powerful. They acknowledge that sometimes it feels like the world is ending. Terrible things are happening; we are filled with anxiety and fear and we feel powerless.

But this passage says ‘have hope’, because redemption and deliverance are on the way and God is near amid the big things happening in the world.

Apocalyptic texts point us to God, amid life’s biggest and scariest moments. Look up for a moment to see the ‘Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory.’ Luke echoes words from the Book of Daniel 7:13:

As I watched in the night visions, I saw one like a human being coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was presented before him.

In Daniel’s image, the one ‘like a son of man’ can be seen as representing the people of God. The coming in a cloud is not God coming down to earth on a cloud in Luke’s version, but the opposite. Humans are coming before the Ancient One, God. But God in Luke’s version comes to us. God’s presence comes amid all that is happening. Yes, big scary things are happening but the text cries ‘Look, God is here!’ Jesus is present and all hope is not lost, the kin(g)dom of God is nearer than you think.

I think this text invites us to look up and lift our heads, for our hope is drawing near. If we look at Jesus in the gospels, we learn that our deliverance comes powerfully and in the unlikeliest of ways. Some folks interpret this passage to mean that Jesus will return to earth literally sitting on a cloud and judge who is a good Christian to be taken up to heaven and everyone else will be left out. But the apocalyptic genre was never written to be interpreted so literally or individualistically. New Testament scholar Bill Loader puts it this way: ‘In the same way the liberation may be less the appearance of the Christ on the clouds and more the rising of the Spirit of Christ in renewal and global transformation.’¹

What if this passage is an invitation to look up and around for the ways in which Christ’s Spirit might be at work and also to do the Spirit’s work? What if the Apocalypse is now? Look around – there are more famines, wars, people displaced, than ever. For many people today is the Apocalypse. Every day is the Apocalypse.

We all experience apocalyptic events. For many of us, with the pandemic, natural disasters, refugee crisis or personal loss, the

Apocalypse feels less mythical and more like our present reality. We have prophets crying out that the world as we know it will pass away if we don't respond to the climate crisis.

If the Apocalypse is now, what do we do? How do we respond in an apocalypse? How do we bring and be the Good News to people who cry out as their world is ending? Luke says we need to be on guard and alert. We should try to look up and find God. And where is God? God is in the unlikeliest of places. God is giving hope to those who feel totally powerless, God is with those whose worlds have just ended and there we are called to be also. God, peace, hope, love and joy are always seeking a home. So let us watch for the ways we might be Christ's loving presence. Let us prepare our hearts and minds to accept the many ways in which Jesus might be made present among us.

Apocalypse is a wild invitation. It is an invitation to not wait for some dramatic coming of Jesus but to join in Jesus' work now. Feed people, protest injustice, love with abandon, comfort people, be radically generous, side with those who are marginalised by society and take care of the world that God has given us. Look up, God has come and is coming in big and small ways – in neighbours, friends, people you don't expect – and in you.

NOTES

1. Loader, W, sourced at <https://billloader.com/LkAdvent1.htm> on 8 December 2022