



St Ronan's Presbyterian Church
Eastbourne

Record

August 2023

6 August	Shared service at Wellesley (Reg Weeks).....	10.00am
13 August	Graeme Munro.....	9.30am
20 August	Informal worship service.....	9.30am
27 August	Gill Burke.....	9.30am
3 September	Informal worship service.....	9.30am

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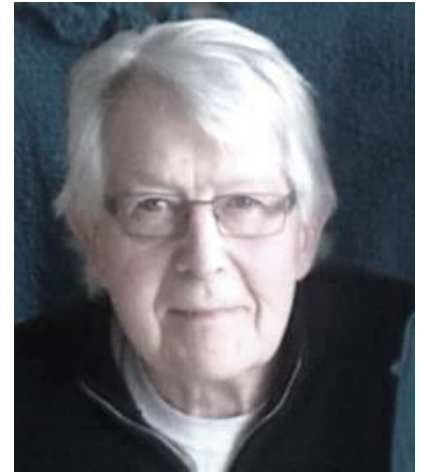
Power Hour – Sundays 9.30am
Breakfast Prayer – Tuesdays 8.00am
Mainly Music – Thursdays 9.15-11.15am

For pastoral care needs, please contact one of the Local Ministry Team
Rev Reg Weeks 027 491 5947, Simon Shaw 562 8772, Colin Dalziel 562 7238 or Sandy Lang
562 8753

Does everything happen for a reason?

Well-meaning people often say, when things go terribly wrong, that “everything happens for a reason”. And, from a strictly analytical perspective that is true – meaning that for every ‘effect’ there must be a ‘cause’. But that’s not what they mean.

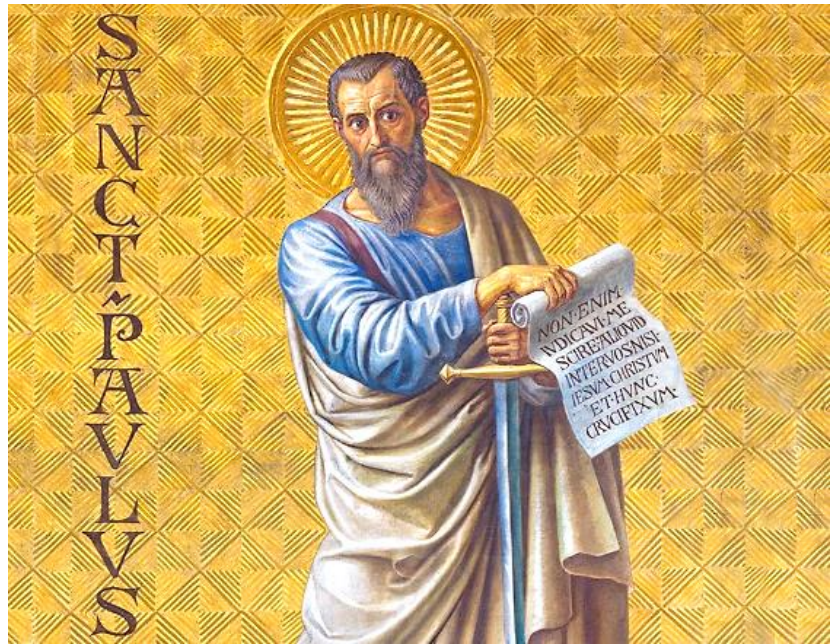
It sometimes feels easier to accept the loss of a job, the end of a relationship, or even the death of a loved one if there might be a purpose behind what happened. Even though at that moment we cannot perceive what that purpose could possibly be.



Shakespeare’s, Hamlet, says it this way to Horatio: *“There’s a divinity that shapes our ends, Rough-hew them how we will...”* (Act 5, Scene 2).

It seems this idea finds its origin in a verse from the letter of Paul to the Christians in Rome where, according to the King James translation (often referred to as the Authorised Version), Paul writes *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God...”* You will find this in Romans 8:26-30 (part of last week’s lectionary).

A commentator on this passage remarked that saying all things work together for good is quite different from saying that God engineers tragic events in human lives to achieve a greater purpose. Such an understanding is manifestly unacceptable for so many reasons, not least because it leads to wondering whether such personal disasters are divine punishment for knowingly or ignorantly breaching some religious law.



When Jesus’ disciples asked whether the blind man’s affliction was because either he or his parents had sinned, his response was an emphatic ‘Neither’. On another occasion he used a tragic accident resulting in the death of eighteen workers at the Tower of Siloam construction site to pour scorn on the idea that this and other such disasters happened because of sin.

The bible message, exemplified in Jesus’ life and teaching, is that God is love. And from a theological perspective, as well as personal experience, we can

affirm that God 'can work through terrible situations to bring good out of them, without assuming that God makes awful things happen just to teach us a lesson.'

In this brief passage from Paul, we also hear the good news that God is with us in our suffering.

LK Fuller, a professor of Pastoral Care, goes on to say, "*even in circumstances that feel completely hopeless, God is doing more than we know to sustain us. God's spirit intercedes for us when we find it hard to pray, pleads for us, helps us in our weakness, and finds ways to bring good out of the most difficult situations.*"

I had long been troubled by Paul's claim that everything works together for good, even if only for those who love God, because obviously they also experience pain, loss and disaster.



Hamlet, Edwin Booth c. 1870

invites us to join in comforting and consoling those who "...suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune..." (Hamlet, Act 3 Scene 1).

Then at the end of my student days, in 1969, 'Good News for Modern Man' was published, sub-titled 'The New Testament in Today's English'. Along with Annie Vallotton's beautiful line drawings, it contained several instances where familiar passages were rendered in significantly different ways. Here, Rom 8:28 reads, "*For we know that in all things God works for good with those who love him...*" What a world of difference!

Rather than all things working together for good, we find that *within* all that may happen, God is working for good. Not only that, but God is working *with* those who love him.

So, instead of the inscrutable will of a distant puppet-master, we have a close and supporting companion who

Reg Weeks

Clerk's corner...



Blame me for the late *Record* this month. It's been one of those months when the dice rolls a 1 or a 2 - over and again - never a 6... In this *Record* issue, a couple of the articles pick up on the randomness of life. We all have those times to a greater or lesser degree, and we just have to muddle through as best we can...



Passings: We've lost two of our core members, Sandra Davies and Jolan (Yolanda) Toth. Their funerals, two almost joyful celebrations of their very different lives. But both lives lived through great difficulty, and both lives lived well, and lived courageously.

No time for obituaries in this *Record* issue. You'll have to wait for the next to learn what I mean.

Over the same short period, St Ronan's has also hosted two 'community' funerals. People not associated with our church but who sought a church funeral. Many see St Ronan's as a place where they are welcome. So, this is part of our outreach/service to the wider Eastbourne community of which we are just a subset.

Workshops: We've also hosted two St John first aid workshops - 18 July and 2 August. These are part of our response to recent events in the congregation.

These Workshops have covered our response to four, not-uncommon, medical emergencies where a 111 call is needed but where the paramedic response it elicits would be too slow to save the life: •How to do CPR, •How to use an AED, •How to deal with choking and •How to deal with severe bleeding. All emergencies that can affect tiny babies (our grandkids), adults (our kids), through to aging adults (most of us).

Each Workshop was fully subscribed (20 people) and took them through the various actions needed. I will organise a third St John Workshop sometime next month (September) and will continue to organise further ones until I can't find willing participants...!

The bottom of a page - I think that will do for now...



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Sandy Lang

Rood screen – Very big numbers...

In June 2023, the US Debt Ceiling was raised to US\$31.4 trillion¹. Like most big numbers, it's hard to wrap one's brain around it to fully appreciate its size, so, let's try a visual...



According to Wikipedia, if you stacked one trillion one-dollar notes, one on top of the other, (theoretically²) you would get a pile 67,866 km high.

For perspective, the average distance to the moon is 384,400 km. But the US Debt ceiling is 31.4 of those stacks, so the total stack of one-dollar bills would reach all the way to the moon 5.7 times! That's a lot of dollar bills!



There are names for many big numbers such as quadrillion and quintillion, but back in 1938, the mathematician Edward Kasner was working on massive numbers related to the size of the universe.

Kasner had a very bright 9-year-old nephew, Milton Sirota (who grew up to be a mathematician himself). Kasner asked the lad what he would call the number 1 followed by 100 zeroes. The boy decided it was a 'googol'. The name sounded cool, and it stuck. In fact, that is still the official name for 10^{100} today.

Googol has spawned other names such as 'googolplex', which is the biggest number imaginable, and is used to understand how many electrons make up the universe – or all the possible ways of winning a game of chess.

Sixty years later, in 1998, two Stanford University PhD students, Sergey Brin and Larry Page were working on naming their start-up venture. Both wanted to name it after a really huge number, since the essence of their company lay in searching and finding endless sources of data online. Sean Anderson, another Stanford graduate student present at the brainstorming session, did an internet search for the name 'googol' to see if it was available as a website domain. But Anderson misspelled it as 'Google.' This was available and Larry Page liked it. So, he registered it and within a few hours, Google was born – and there is no doubt that Google has changed our lives forever.



¹ I have used the American names. An American trillion is 10^{12} [12 zeros] while the British trillion is 10^{18} . [18 zeros]

² Apart from the lack of structural integrity of the pile, there are simply not that many dollar bills in circulation.

As science maps out the universe and discovers ever tinier things, there will always be a need to find names for bigger numbers, but you simply don't get numbers bigger than we use to describe God - "omnipotent, omnipresent and omniscient."

Isaiah 40:28. *"Have you not known? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth. He does not faint or grow weary; his understanding is unsearchable."*

And Psalm 147:5. *"Great is our Lord, and abundant in power; his understanding is beyond measure."*

Or, in the words of the familiar hymn: *"My God is so big, so strong and so mighty there's nothing my God cannot do. The mountains are His, the rivers are His. The stars are His handiwork too. My God is so big, so strong and so mighty there's nothing my God cannot do."*

And this is the very same God who loves you and me.

John Harris

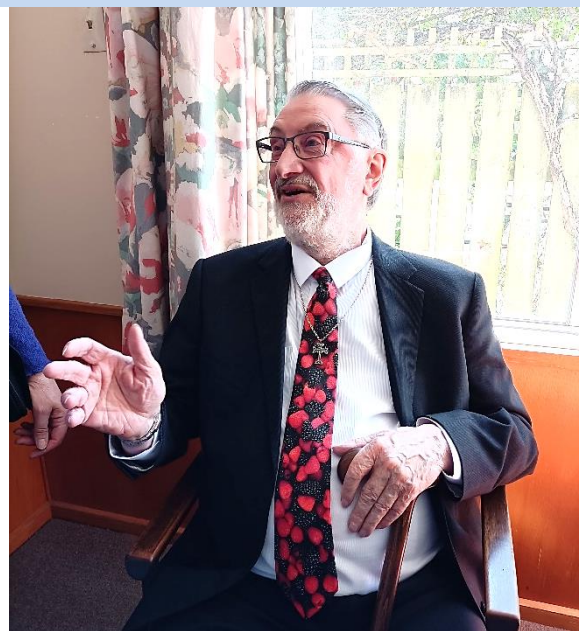
A meditation on winter...

Four times a year – on the fifth Sundays – St Ronan's has a Fellowship Lunch at which the Rev Doug Rogers delivers a short homily. Those at the July 30 gathering were treated to some delicious homemade food and some useful thoughts to take home.

A recent cold snap and the struggle to feel warm had inspired Doug to look at what the Bible has to say about winter. A celebration in Jewish tradition, *Hannukah*, is held about the time of the European Winter Solstice, he said.

This year it starts on December 15 and runs for eight days. This festival commemorates the re-dedication of the Temple following Judas Maccabeus defeating the Syrians in 160 BC. On that day, one day's supply of oil lasted for the next eight days. The festival is celebrated by lighting lamps and so has become known as the Festival of Lights. It is also known as the Festival of Oil.

Searching the Bible further, Doug came up with three things to remember when considering winter. Job 24:3-8 is a reminder that winter is a time to care for others. Doug used a paraphrase version in contemporary English from *The Message Bible*:



They rip off the poor and exploit the unfortunate, push the helpless into the ditch, bully the weak so that they fear for their lives. The poor, like stray dogs and cats, scavenge for food in back alleys. They sort through the garbage of the rich, eke out survival on handouts. Homeless, they shiver through cold nights on the street; they've no place to lay their heads. Exposed to the weather, wet and frozen, they huddle in makeshift shelters.

The relevance of these verses when considering people living on the margins of society in New Zealand today, forced to sleep on the streets or in their cars, is all too clear. Not to mention the challenge to do something about it...

Doug turned next to Ecclesiastes 12:1-4 where he found a reminder that we should take advantage of our time, for winter and accompanying older age are coming for all of us. Ecclesiastes 12:1-4, again from *the Message Bible*:

Honour and enjoy your Creator while you're still young, Before the years take their toll and your vigour wanes, before your vision dims and the world blurs and the winter years keep you close to the fire. In old age, your body no longer serves you so well. Muscles slacken, grip weakens, joints stiffen. The shades are pulled down on the world. You can't come and go at will. Things grind to a halt. The hum of the household fades away. You are wakened now by birdsong.

But we also need to remember that winter passes and spring is coming, with its promises of new life and messages of hope. In the depths of winter, we need to look ahead to what spring may bring. Doug looked to the Song of Solomon 21:0-13 (the New Revised Standard Version) for his inspiration:

My beloved speaks and says to me: "Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away; for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone. The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land. The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away."

Doug finished his reflection by reading New Zealand poet and artist Juliet Batten's 'A Blessing for Winter' from her 2010 collection *Dancing with the Seasons: Inspiration and resilience through times of change*.

*May you enter your darkness like an explorer.
May you find treasure in your own depths.
May you hold and nurture the tiny seed of new life
scarcely felt yet known.
May you hold faith with your deepest dreams.*

Anne Manchester

Flowers for Sandra Davies' memorial service...



Local artist and St Alban's member Jutta Chisholm put together this beautiful arrangement for the recent memorial service for Sandra Davies. The jasmine, stocks, lilies, and rosemary added fragrance to the visual appeal. While the larger flowers were professionally grown, some were gifted by Ren's extended family and many of the others were gathered from local gardens.

For the service, Sandra's family moved the lowest vase to the communion table where they could be more easily seen beside a small wooden box of ashes. A painting of flowers by Sandra was placed at the base of the arrangement. During the service Sandra's three younger sisters brought up floral tributes to lay beside the casket of her ashes.

Flowers - so wonderful and transient - are perhaps the only tangible things we can give to others during their lifetime, and after it. Rest In Peace Sandra, and our

condolences to Ren and to Sandra's families and many friends.

Gill Burke

On Death (by Lebanese/American poet Kahlil Gibran 1883–1931)

*You would know the secret of death.
But how shall you find it unless you seek it in the heart of life?
The owl whose night-bound eyes are blind unto the day
cannot unveil the mystery of light.*

*If you would indeed behold the spirit of death,
open your heart wide unto the body of life.
For life and death are one, even as the river and the sea are one.*

*For what is it to die but to stand naked in the wind and to melt into the sun?
And what is it to cease breathing, but to free the breath from its restless tides,
that it may rise and expand and seek God unencumbered?*

*Only when you drink from the river of silence shall you indeed sing.
And when you have reached the mountain top, then you shall begin to climb.
And when the earth shall claim your limbs, then shall you truly dance.*

[Contributed by Anne Manchester, this reading from Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*, chapter 27, was read by Jill Herman and Sue Jones at Sandra Davies' memorial service on Saturday, July 29, at St Ronan's Church. A full obituary will be published in next month's *Record*.]

Power Hour – Connecting with God

What do we do today about this quote?

*Listen, people of Israel! The Lord our God is the only LORD.
Love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your strength.
Always remember these commands I give you today.
Teach these to your children, and talk about them when you sit at home and
walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Deut 6:4-7*

This command suggests that we, as adults, walk hand in hand with our children, sharing and conversing with them about day-to-day life moments. The catch is to stop and notice things, along with the children. It doesn't have to be adult-driven but it does need to be adult-supported. Here's an example. A child finds a fly and with a parent learns how to carefully capture it and release it outdoor. An opportunity to share about its anatomy and its role in the lives of plants and other animals.

The writer of Deuteronomy also encourages us to connect with God in our ordinary lives such as:

- sitting together at a meal
- sharing toys
- walking to school and noticing what's in the neighbour's garden
- or exploring the fallen spiky fruit of the whau tree
- or the paper-thin shell of the cape gooseberry and the yellow berry inside
- the gorgeous pink/orange sunsets - so heavenly sent,
- the worms that come to the surface after rain
- differences in the barks of dogs
- the colours, shapes and scents of flowers
- tree roots that poke up through the path
- stones and shells on the beach

Our children are excellent at taking the first steps of interest in the life around them. Being spontaneous with children and going with their flow, allows us to respond positively about God's wondrous gifts and creations in our world.

As Annette Osborne says³, *Faith thrives when we encourage children and young people to look for God in the everyday rhythms of their lives; their football game, school friends, art projects or poetry assignments. God can be found in the peak experience of camp, but also*

³A Osborne. Connect to God, SUNZ Adventure, Jan. 2023, pp 8-9

in the smallest seemingly insignificant, or even boring parts of our lives. God cares about all of these things."

How can we expect our young adults to appreciate and care for the wider environment if they haven't developed a sense of worthiness and respect for their immediate environment? To say again, children and youth best learn through discovery with adult support. Caring experts don't happen overnight!

Here are some practical examples that we can easily use with children:

- Exploring our neighbourhood on walks, including the beach
- Sharing darkness indoors, and outside united under the stars
- Evening prayers at the dinner table and bedtime – moments to give thanks for people, activities and parts of our day
- A simple thought of gratitude: What was a good thing today?
- Psalm 148 - "I praise God for..."
- Turn off the electronic devices and do things together

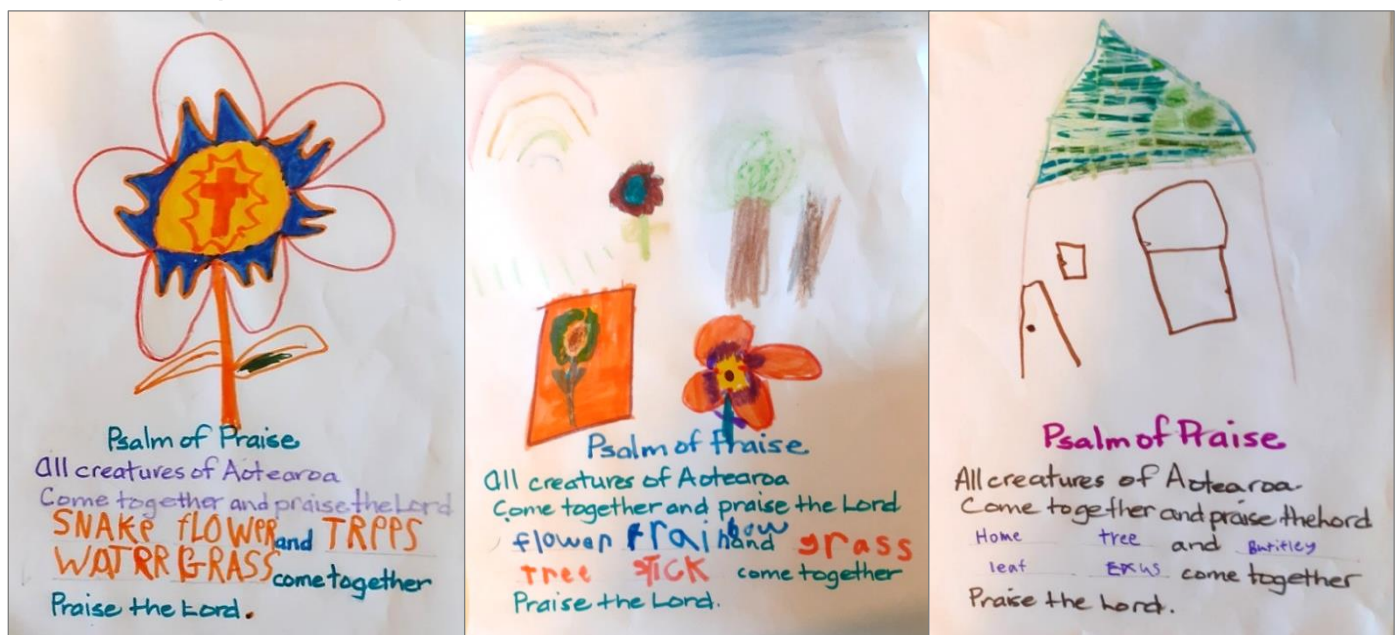
Annette Osborne goes on to say: *Slowing down our pace of living, and noticing is a spiritual discipline of value.* Christian meditation also requires this focus to reach new depths and growth.

Recently our Power Hour children had a lot to say about worms! It was very much their slowed down observation and action to care for them. Worms were discussed because we were creating our own Psalm of Praise of God's creation of our world and their appreciation of things that matter to them.

Here are the children's psalms and drawings; their grateful reflections on things from God's world. The whole world (sky, sun, rainbow, trees, flowers, sticks, grass) – exquisite, colourful flowers and Jesus; and my home and family/us.

TERM 3: July 23 to September 10

Susan Connell



Phil's photo – Buying back time...

One could be forgiven for feeling a bit down with all that's going on just now in the wider world, in New Zealand and in our little village by the sea.

These days the media are having a field day over the political leaders who've come unstuck, the backstabbing as the election wind-up starts, news of dreadful crimes in Auckland and Christchurch, the ~~Dominion~~ Post being negative (as usual) and the sad passing of two from our church community - Sandra and Yolanda. Not to mention the bitter southerlies that just seem to go on and on.

But, out of sadness and despair, there always seems to come something positive. Recently, for me, this was an invitation to photograph three rugby league finals over the last weekend of July.

It was with a joyful heart I went to the *Wellington Rugby League* grounds and photographed the *Men's Premier Reserve* and later the *Premier Finals*.

The crowd who packed the ground, were jubilant, with lots of banter and laughter. Before each game we sang our national anthem.





As the game started, I thought to myself 'I'd love to play just one more game of footie' (even league - which I've never played). Then I thought 'That's never going to happen.' I was reminded of

a fabulous letter to the editor of NZ's *Wilderness Magazine* (Aug 2023) from Sharon Boulton who wrote about her personal motto *Not even the richest person in the world can buy back time*. Okay, I realised, 'I'll never play footie again - so play the game through the lens of your camera' - which I did as I became more absorbed.

The following day it was off to Ngati Toa Domain, Porirua where the Premier Women's Rugby League final was held. Again, the same cheerful atmosphere as well as the hard-playing style that this game produces.

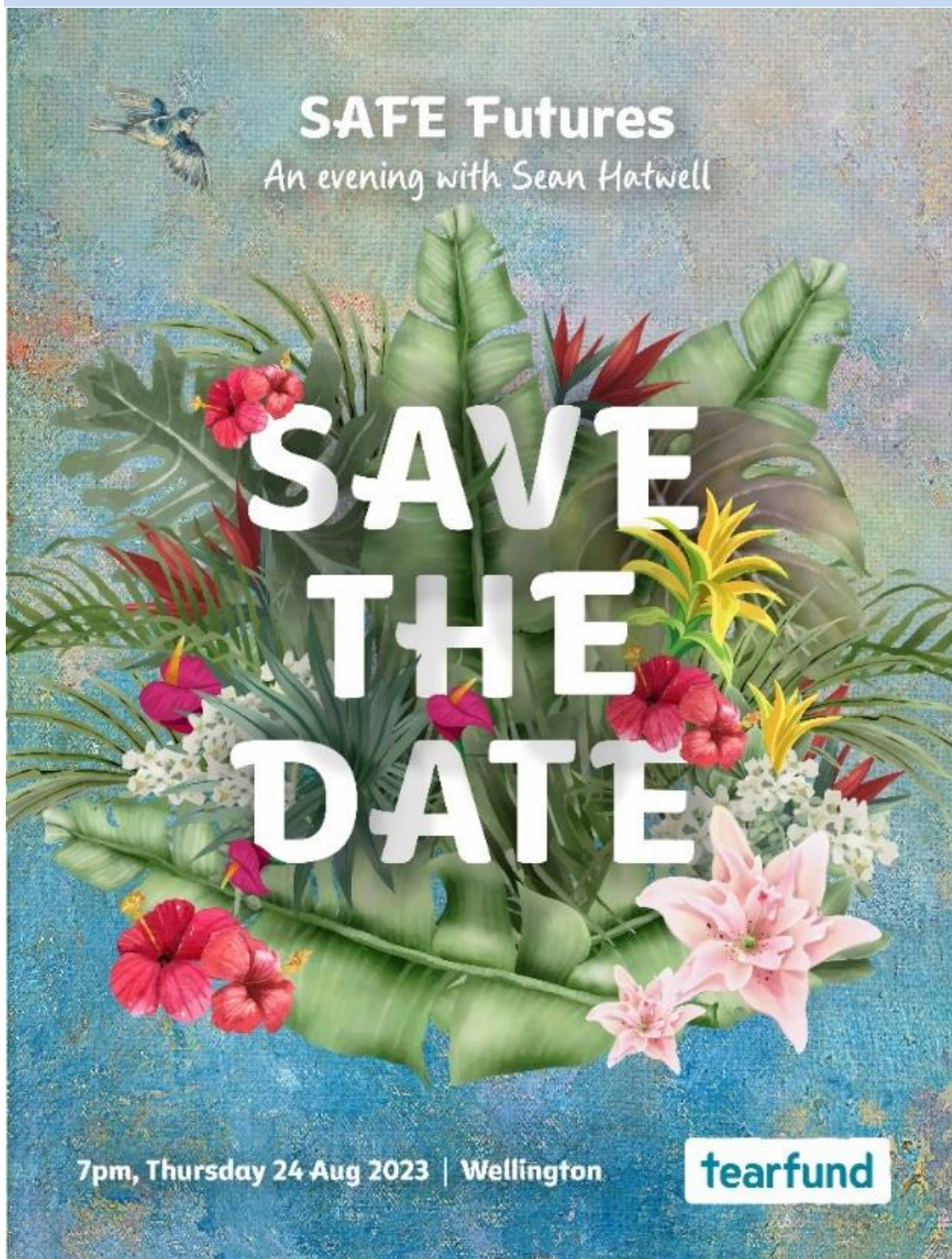
My weekend ended on Sunday evening when Daisy Belle said, in her clearest doggie way, *'Heh, big fella. Walkies. Now.'* So, off we went in the still night air along the promenade.; with Daisy Belle happily sniffing up all the olfactory messages left for her by the day's earlier walkers.

In the distance I saw flashing lights in the sky. Surely not fireflies? No, planes arriving/departing the airport. The last flights of the day bringing happiness to their passengers.

I did not feel alone. On my pocket radio I listened to Favourite Hymns on Southern Star radio. Traditional hymns: Blessed Assurance..., All creatures that on earth do dwell..., Guide me O thou Great Jehovah..., Abide with me...

Hymns I learnt in the assemblies at Hutt Valley High School and at Bible Class Camps in the late-50s/early-60s. Thus ended my fabulous weekend.

Phil Bengé



As one of New Zealand's top investigators of trafficking and exploitation, and former *Head of Organised Crime* for Tearfund's partner *LIFT International* in Thailand, Sean will lift the lid on his many years at the coal face of fighting modern day slavery.

Join us for an evening of gripping storytelling and hear about Tearfund's expansion into the Pacific to tackle the growing epidemic of abuse and exploitation.

Our new *SAFE Programme* is a 5-year partnership with the *NZ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MFAT)* to see communities become Safe, Aware, Free and Empowered in Asia Pacific.

SAFE blends Tearfund's expertise in developing sustainable livelihoods along with anti-exploitation initiatives.

Tearfund Partnerships Team, Thurs 24 August 2023, 7:00pm MOJO @ Featherston 55 Featherston Street, Wellington www.tearfund.org.nz

THE FUTURE OF **FOOD AND ENERGY**



DR MIKE JOY

**DEGROWTH IS INESCAPABLE.
WE CAN MANAGE IT OR HAVE IT
FORCED UPON US.**



**SUNDAY AUGUST 13 @ 3PM, KOHA WELCOME
ST. RONAN'S, 234 MURITAI ROAD, EASTBOURNE**



**Eastern Bays Climate Response Network
[HTTPS://EASTBOURNE.NZ/EVENT/DEGROWTH/](https://eastbourne.nz/event/degrowth/)
climate@eastbourne.nz**

For more see: www.eastbourne.nz/event/degrowth



Our God calls us to worship and grow together and to show the love of Christ through serving our community.

Directory

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Contributions for the 'Record' are most welcome
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The views and opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors
They do not necessarily represent those of St Ronan's Church

**And the closing date for our next *Record* for September 2023
is Sunday 27 August 2023**