



Charman Uniting Church

News Letter

3rd May 2026 Vol 7 No 14 Easter 5

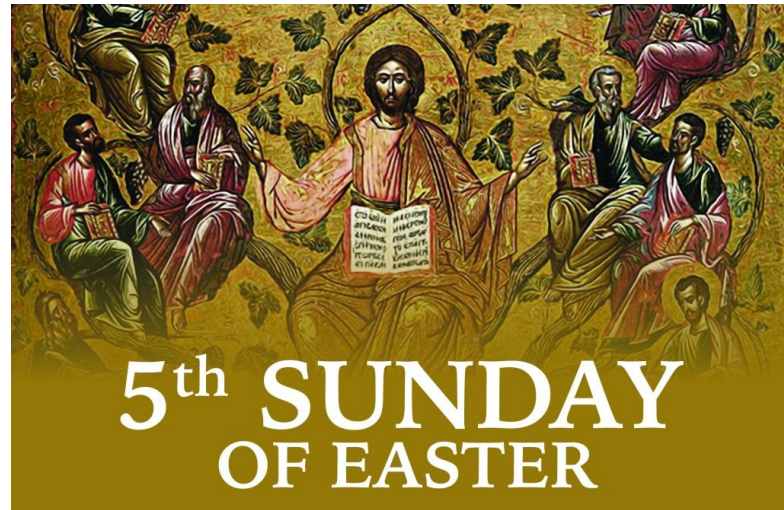


The Fifth Sunday of Easter emphasises the Church's call to spread the Good News as echoed by the early disciples. The readings remind us that Christ's resurrection is not just a past event, but a living call to bear witness to the faith. But as Stephen found out ...

"When Life Seems To Be Closing In"

The stoning of Stephen

One day a man falls off a cliff, but manages to grab hold of a tree limb on the way down. The man calls out, "Is there anyone up there?" A voice answers back, "I am here. It is I, the Lord. Do you believe in me?" "Yes, Lord I believe, I really believe, but I can't hold on much longer." "That's all right. If you really believe you have nothing to worry about. I'll save you. Just let go of the branch." There was a long pause, and the man calls out, "Is there anyone else up there?"



Sooner or later we all go through a time where life seems to be closing in on us. Desperation has set in. Prices are going up and income is going down; responsibilities are increasing and physical strength is waning; friends disappoint and circumstances seem to be weighted against us.

In the scripture reading, Stephen's world is closing in around him. We're first introduced to Stephen in the sixth chapter of Acts. The disciples were preaching with such strength and fervour that their numbers were increasing daily, but those in Greek society were concerned because the widows were being neglected. In keeping with Hebrew law, widows were provided a daily distribution of food since they had no husband to earn a living and provide food for the household. Complaints were reaching the disciples that because of their continual preaching and teaching the widows were being neglected. The disciples felt as though their calling was to preach the gospel, so they selected seven men of good standing, full of the Spirit and wisdom, and appointed them to the task of caring for the widows. Stephen was among the seven appointed to this task.

No sooner is Stephen appointed to this ministry than he is arrested. The Jews always looked upon themselves as the chosen people; but they had interpreted chosen in the wrong way. They regarded themselves as chosen for special privileges and believing that God had no use for any other nation. At their worst they declared that God created the Gentiles to be fuel for the fires of hell; at their mildest they believed that some day the Gentiles would become their servants. They never dreamed that they were chosen for service to bring all people into the same relationship with God as they themselves enjoyed.



When this selection of these first deacons was finished, the Jews were infuriated that none of the original seven had a Jewish name. Nicolaos was a Gentile who had accepted the Jewish faith, and Stephen had a vision of a world for Christ. Stephen declared that the world-view according to Christ meant that the Temple must pass away, and that the Law was but a stage so that the gospel and Christianity could be sent out to the whole wide world. In proclaiming this belief, Stephen offended the Jews because he attacked the two institutions they hold most precious: Temple and Law.

He was immediately arrested. False witnesses were brought in to give testimony against Stephen, and when the high priest asks him, "Are these things true?" he launches into a sermon that leaves them "enraged and grinding their teeth." **Life is closing in on Stephen.**

The account of his being stoned is not on a feel good, warm-fuzzy story, but when we look closely at Stephen's stoning, there are a few things that still speak to us today. First of all, we notice that when life began to close in around Stephen, the heavens opened up and he saw God. Has life ever been closing in on you to the point that you screamed and you cried and you shouted so that the heavens might open up? Whether you were screaming for healing for a loved one or deliverance from an uncomfortable situation. Stephen didn't magically make this happen, in fact, no one else there saw it. They claimed that it was blasphemy, and that it didn't happen, but what I would like to suggest is that it was because of his faith and belief that Stephen was in a position to experience God in that way. I dare say that Stephen wasn't expecting to experience God in this way.

When life is closing in around us, the heavens may not always open as we want them to, but when our faith draws us close to God, and if we'll allow it, we can experience the same type of reassurance that Stephen experienced. It didn't change Stephen's circumstances, but it brought him peace. As people of faith, that's what we're after. We also see that Stephen prayed.

There's the story of a bus driver and a minister standing in line to get into heaven. The bus driver approached the gate and St. Peter said, "Welcome, I understand you were a bus driver. Since I'm in charge of housing, I believe I have found the perfect place for you. See that mansion over the hilltop? It's yours." The minister heard all this and began to stand a little taller. He said to himself, "If a bus driver got a place like that, just think what I'll get." The minister approached the gate and St. Peter said, "Welcome, I understand you were a minister. See that shack in the valley?"

St. Peter had hardly gotten the words out of his mouth when the shocked minister said, "I was a minister, I preached the gospel, I helped teach people about God. Why does that bus driver get a mansion, and I get a shack? St. Peter responded, "Well, it seems when you preached, people slept. When the bus driver drove, people prayed."

Stephen doesn't cry out to God asking to be saved. Stephen doesn't look to strike a deal, saying, "God, if you will only save me, then I will...," instead he says, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Sounds an awful lot like a prayer Christ uttered from a cross. It's a way of saying, "God, I'm turning it over to you. God, take me, hold me, calm me down, and comfort me." The truth about prayer is it's not so much about getting answers from God, as it is developing oneness with God. Hear that again: prayer is not so much about getting answers from God as it is developing a oneness with God.

Stephen had that oneness. How else could he have gazed up into the heavens and seen the glory of God with Christ at his right hand, while others stood ready with rocks in their hands? Stephen didn't call out for an answer, he didn't call out to be saved, he called out for reassurance and peace. That's oneness with God.

When life knocks you down and begins to close in around you, remember Stephen. His faith and belief in God were such that the heavens opened up and brought him reassurance that he could pray for God to receive his spirit. My prayer for each of you is that you'll develop a oneness with God so that your prayer can be for God to hold and comfort and soothe your spirit, that the heavens might be opened up and you might experience God in a way that you never expected. That's oneness with God. Amen.

David Washburn Chestnut Grove Baptist Church Earlysville, Virginia



Read the full text at ...

SermonCentral

STOP PRESS!
***Charman is getting
very close!***



We now officially have “Certificate of Occupancy” for the new Cheltenham development. There are still a few things to be finished before we get ‘builder’s handover’, but this should be a matter of formality.

We will be having a **“Farewell Luncheon” after church at Black Rock on Sunday 17th May**. Please let any present and former members of the congregation know of this event and let Jenny Collins (0409 936 377) know for catering purposes. David Higham will be representing the Presbytery of Port Phillip East and there will be time for thanks and reminiscences of the long history of the Black Rock Congregation.

At this stage it seems *most likely* that our first service at Cheltenham will be on **Sunday 24th May**. Move in and equipment testing will commence next week - fingers crossed ... but it’s looking good ...



“Good earth” has been delivered and is being spread out for a new garden

One of the finishing touches .. the shade sails have been raised so that even a tall person can walk under them!



VICTORIA CHORALE
ART OF SOUND ORCHESTRA

WOLFGANG AMADEUS
MOZART

GREAT
MASS
IN C
MINOR

SOPRANO
MOLLY
RYAN

MEZZO SOPRANO
SALLY-ANNE
RUSSELL

TENOR
JIACHENG
DING

BARITONE
MICHAEL
LAMPARD

CONDUCTOR
MARIO
DOBERNIG

SATURDAY 16 MAY 5 PM, ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL
CNR FLINDERS & SWANSTON STREETS, MELBOURNE
EARLY BIRD TICKETS \$70 UNTIL 31 MARCH
TRYBOOKING.COM/DJDIF PENSIONER, STUDENT
AND CHILD DISCOUNTS APPLY





Bible Readings May 2026 *(the readings used in our service may differ slightly)*

May 3rd	Easter 5	Acts 7:55-60	Psalms 31:1-5, 15-16	1 Peter 2:2-10	John 14:1-14
May 10th	Easter 6	Acts 17:22-31	Psalms 66:8-20	1 Peter 3:13-22	John 14:15-21
May 17th	Easter 7	Acts 1:6-14	Psalms 68:1-10, 32-35	1 Peter 4:12-14, 5:6-11	John 17:1-11
May 24th	Pentecost	Acts 2:1-21 or Num 11:24-30	Psalms 104:24-34, 35b	1 Cor 12:3b-13 or Acts 2:1-21	John 20:19-23 or John 7:37-39
May 31st	Trinity Sunday	Genesis 1:1 – 2:4a	Psalms 8	2 Cor 13:11-13	Matthew 28:16-20

CROSSLIGHT is available on the internet - click on the following link or the CROSSLIGHT image to view online. www.crosslight.org.au

Print copies of CROSSLIGHT are available at the entrance of the Black Rock Uniting Church.



We pray for all in need especially -

Prayers of the People



Pastor Di
Jo-ann on the loss of brother Ian
Tina, friend of Joan Wood
Phillip (Barbara's nephew)
Barry
Les
Adrian
Maria
Anne-Maree, Andrew and their
daughter, Rachel
Emily
Karen

Helen Cole
Gloria, Samson & Family
Jenny and Janine Bartholomeusz
Anita and Kingsley
Joyce Curnow
Stuart - addiction struggles
Helen & Earle Hosking
Grace & Van Rensberg
Joan's friends Robyn & Jemma
Kath Tondorf
Susan Hoskin

Mark
Mary
Margaret Walker
Joyce Carpenter
Andrew
Bronwyn
Teresa
Sybil Bond
June and Grace Fairbank

*We give thanks for those whose
prayers have been answered..*

WEEKLY OFFERINGS: Thanks to everyone who have continued to make their weekly offering.

Direct Debit: Cheltenham / Mentone members note that direct payments can now be made to our Westpac account at Southland, **BSB number is 033 358, Account Number is 664 881** Payee "UCA Cheltenham Mentone Parish"
Although we are now the Charman Uniting Church, we expect banking arrangements to remain the same as before, for the rest of the year.

SOCIAL COLLECTION DEPARTMENT:

BayCISS - collection of goods by Graeme & Joan Wood has recommenced. Leave goods with them at 66 Bernard St. Cheltenham, or call them on 9555 0462

Emerge - Financial help is the best way to help - Cheques to - GPO Box 420 Melbourne VIC 3001 or donate via the website www.emergesupport.org.au
Emerge welcomes vouchers for supermarkets or art materials which children could use at home - materials, pencils, colouring books etc. Margaret Bode is happy to collect items if you leave them at her home, 16 Monaco Street Parkdale. **Donations in an envelope marked EMERGE may be left in the collection plate.**



OUR YOUTUBE CHANNEL:



Click on the YouTube logo to view a selection of **over 200** sermons and service preludes

*This week's video -
Pastor Di Paterson 26th April
2026*

Click on image or [HERE](#) to
view



Church on the Internet - Sunday 10am *(virtual doors open 9:45 am)*



If you don't have Zoom on your computer/laptop/iPad/Smartphone, click on <https://zoom.us/support/download>

Then click on this link below or the "Sunday Church" image to join our Service

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82004410836?pwd=cU9RWlhVMm8wOUw0TStLV1EvNFdYdz09>

Meeting ID: 820 0441 0836 Passcode: 665 784

You can also join us on your phone by dialling **03 7018 2005** and entering the above meeting details.

**Sunday Church
on Zoom**



Life's Trials and Tribulations

