

Dear Saints,

I love how St. Paul in the epistles calls the members of the church “saints” and “beloved”. This is exactly who we are. God sees us not as we deserve but God sees us through the righteousness of Christ. When I call St. Columba’s “saints” I want it to be a reminder to you of how God sees us.

During a pastoral visit this week, I was reminded of the idea that the church is a hospital for the sin-sick. The church is a place where *God* transforms us rather than a place where you and I ‘deal with each other’. God intends to grow us, not diminish us. God determines to love us, not control us.

Love frees us; love grows us; love increases our human agency; love does not seek to control. Of course, love also puts boundaries in place. One such boundary is there is a difference between God and ourselves. We are like God – what the Scriptures call the *Imago Dei*, the image of God in us; but get this: God is not like us! We are like God, but God is not like us. There is a boundary.

Thus, we recognise that while we are in the image of God, God is not in our image. Therefore, while *anthropomorphism* – assigning metaphorical human character to God, is helpful in some ways; it is also unhelpful when we absolutize such attributes. God is not in *our* image. We must preserve that important boundary: God is not in our image. *We* are in God’s image. It is vital we do not confuse that boundary.

There is one theological exception to that. Jesus the Christ. He alone is the true image of God. This is exactly what the Nicene Creed affirms. What makes Jesus unique in Christian theology is that he is the only being who is both. I’m burning to say more, much more, but the theological sermon is long enough!

2 Thessalonians 1:3 (NRSV, Anglicised) says, “We must always give thanks to God for you, brothers and sisters, as is right, because your faith is growing abundantly, and the love of every one of you for one another is increasing” (Paul). God desires our increase in faith! God desires our love for one another to grow!

Another thing I am burning to share with you are the plans for our Centenary celebration. St. Columba's is One Hundred Years in 2023!

Since God desires us to grow in faith and in love for one another, I suggested to the Session that we have a **Key Text** for 2023. I took it from Psalm 40:5 for this is what an anniversary is: looking back and forward.

Psalm 40:5 "You, Lord God, have done many wonderful things, and you have planned marvellous things for us."

Our **Key Hymn** we will sing at every Holy Communion Service this year, is: **#584 "To God Be The Glory".**

And our **Theme** for the year 2023 is: **Healing. Hope. Heart.**

When God calls us "saints" it is because we are being *healed* completely in Christ; we are a people with *Christ-hope*; and we are a people in whom God has placed a *heart* of flesh (cf. Ezekiel 36:26).

There are two key developments for 2023 at St. Columba's. I have discussed this with the Session, and this weekend it is on the agenda for our combined Session and Stewardship meeting.

1. I believe God is leading us to minister to the office workers around Hatfield. We can hugely increase our worshipping attendance by holding a mid-week Service for office workers all around 327 Hilda St.

Starting in Lent 2023, we will be offering **a mid-week, lunch-time, Wednesday Service @ 12pm for 45 minutes**. It will be designed to cater to office workers, but everyone is welcome.

2. I believe God is laying on my heart a kind of ministry called *Dinner Church*. We would have begun this in 2020 - until COVID19 hit the world. Dinner Church is simply what it says: **God's people sharing a meal together around a format of prayer, Scripture, fellowship, and food.**

It will take place once per month and is an opportunity to invite friends to a new format of worship. Jesus was adamant in calling the church to gather around a meal. Watch this space!

Finally, our hearts are in pain for the 20,000 people who lost their lives in the devastating earthquake in Turkey & Syria. Also, at the end of our

Parliament's SONA, we remember to pray for SA and our elected leaders.

Wishing you a blessed week, friends, Beloveds, saints

Rev Craig

12 February 2023