

## Easter Day 2011

*Acts 10:34-43; Hymn to the Risen Christ; Colossians 3:1-4; Matthew 28: 1-10*

With tomorrow being Anzac Day, I begin this morning with an excerpt from a diary of an Anzac on the Western Front in WWI, demonstrating an experience of being given a second chance at life. He calls 'engaging with the enemy' a 'stunt'.

*The stunt on September 20<sup>th</sup> opened up at about five or six o'clock and a pretty sight it was. We could see our glorious barrages sweeping the country in front of us and the prisoners who came in were absolutely nervestruck. It was an easy victory and all objectives were taken both by our division and those on either sides of us. Our part of the battle was Glencorse Wood and the battle was called the battle of Menin Road. The worst part of our task was after the advance. The taking of a position was comparatively easy with the magnificent artillery we had behind us but the holding of that position is the time when most lives are lost. We had to face intense artillery barrages in our new position and that night of the twentieth September is the most awful I have ever experienced. Two of our boys were killed in the advance. ... and now I cannot understand how it was any of us came out of that night (with the) hell (that) followed. Our gun was placed on one shell hole and we spent the night in the one adjoining it, with no protection except the skys above and they wont stop whiz, bangs. I saw some sights that night that won't stand telling. But if I never said my prayers earnestly before they went out earnestly enough that time. I know now that there is a God above us and I thank him for keeping me safe through it all. I don't think there was another yard of ground that escaped shelling except the little part where we were. One can even find humour in a position like this. We were all lying down under a waterproof sheet except for the one on gas guard and one of my pals Paddy Bennet was asleep. (Pat could sleep anywhere). When all of a sudden whack! A big flat piece of shell hit me on the thigh and woke Pat up with a start. "What the ... was that" he said, and when I showed him the piece that hit me he was astonished that I was not wounded.*

The author of this diary extract is Roy Stanley Jackson a young Presbyterian man from Sydney, my grandfather. His diary was digitized and sent to family members in 2009 and this is the first time I have been aware of any of it being read publicly.

He describes a near miss above and in other places of the diary other miraculous escapes from death. Clearly he was blessed that he didn't die in action, including with a shell landing on this thigh!

With that blessing of being spared from death his second chance at life enabled more new life through his many descendants. My mother was born in 1920 and clearly I am a recipient, along with my siblings and cousins, of the new life possibilities. I am blessed that Roy had a second chance at living.

We Australians know how new life comes from an apparent failure. It is often said that from the deaths and wounds of our ANZACS our nation was born. None of our ANZACS died in vain and under fire they did not let us down. Out of death came a whole new life, a different life. Out of their brave, dogged sacrifice came a national spirit.

In this year alone many people have been rescued from death in natural disasters, disasters of massive proportions. And for many it became a time to leave this life rather suddenly.

Whether we live or whether we die in the natural, the Easter event – the whole Easter event of the death and resurrection of the Sent One, the Messiah, rescued us from death in the eternal scheme of things. Until Jesus died we, every generation of people, were on death row. All humanity had a sentence of eternal death over them with no repeal possible because of the rebellious sin of the first humans. The consequence of sin always has been and will be – death.

But we are blessed because Jesus rescued us – all of humanity – from death!

Jesus went through the door of death when he died on the cross and conquered death. He, and He alone, is the only one who can lead us into life.

Even though He paid such a price. Even though it cost Him so much – He doesn't force us to go into life with Him. Rather He draws us by being lifted high – where we can see His love for us.

And how wonderful it is when we receive it.

New life begins for each of us when we say 'yes' to Jesus.

How blessed we are for He leads us into life.

We now have hope.

We now have promise.

We have been adopted into Jesus' family.

We are children of The King.

We are being prepared for a royal wedding – ours with the Son of God.

Our needs are looked after by our loving Father who cares for us and knows every hair on our head.

We are God's beloved.

We are so precious to God our Father that He gave the life of His Son for us. He wanted us back close to Him so much.

God has lavished His best on us.

The surprise of the empty tomb is our JOY!

It is the sign of our second chance at life – life rescued from death.

With the sacrifice of our ANZACS came a whole new nation, a nation with an ANZAC spirit.

We celebrate today a far greater event because from the death of the Son of God on that Friday a whole Kingdom was brought to earth – the Kingdom of God and a whole new Spirit was soon to be sent to earth to enable us to live in that Kingdom while on earth. The death and resurrection of Jesus has enabled His Kingdom to become our Kingdom – the place where we have been adopted and where we belong for eternity.

This Kingdom is full of life, life in abundance.

It is full of love: unconditional, unfailing love. Love that forgives quickly, that doesn't take offence.

This Kingdom is full of joy.

It is full of understanding.

Of healing, of compassion, and wholeness.

It is full of light – in it there is no darkness at all. For in its King there is no darkness at all. The character of the King reveals the characteristics of the Kingdom.

In this Kingdom we are so blessed.

In this Kingdom we have deep, abiding companionship with our Lord and Maker; with His Son our rescuer and Saviour, who is now our Betrothed; and with His Spirit guiding, teaching, leading and empowering us.

We are so blessed for life in this Kingdom is our life.

And

Once we walk into life with Jesus it gets better and better for eternity. It never stops getting better – for the nature of God is to give and give and give, unceasingly, generously.

Oh we are so blessed and we have so much to celebrate:

- for Jesus' resurrection has become our resurrection;
- His new life has become our **new** life.

For each of us, when we choose to accept His rescue of us from death and take His hand and walk with Him into life we step into His eternal Kingdom, into our inheritance now.

On Maundy Thursday Helen reminded us of Jesus' words about loving service to one another and how we are blessed if we do them.  
God loves to bless us.

Today we celebrate best moment of our blessing – there isn't any better.

We are blessed because:

- Jesus rescued us from death; and
- Because Jesus leads us into life.

Alleluia – He is risen!  
He is risen indeed!

Let us pray:

- Prayer for those who may not have chosen life with Jesus – to put their hand in His and walk with Him into life.
- For those who did this in past but somewhere in journey have taken their handout of His, and gone walking on own.
- Prayer for those in this amazing place of a second chance – of being in our inheritance – for great joy to fill us and flow from us to all around us.