



KNOX CHURCH

love faith outreach community justice

Pastoral Newsletter

30 January, 2026

Kia ora Knox Community,

As is the custom now, in some of the months when we don't have a "Knox Life", I send out a community newsletter.

Attending to a problem

When the replacement "soft close" toilet seat and lid set arrived after a two month delay, I brought it home and set to attaching it to the toilet. In order to do this, I needed to unscrew the old seat mounts from the toilet base. Thinking to myself "I have a drill that could help me with these screws", I retrieved my electric drill from the garage, clipped on the lithium battery and pressed the trigger. A zero response from the drill caused me to attach the battery to the charger. No "charging" light shone. I completed the toilet seat task with an old fashioned screwdriver.



Here begins a twelve step story.

1. Plan to "nip up" to Bunnings, since they alone stock the branded parts I need to match my drill. End up not "nipping up", since Harewood Road is experiencing major road works. The journey takes forever. I take the battery and the charger with me.
2. Since a charger is cheaper than a battery, I indulge in some wishful thinking and talk to the friendly staff member about buying a new charger. I joke to her, as I thank her for her help, that the problem isn't with the battery.
3. I drive home very slowly.
4. At home, I reason (given the persistent non-shining of the charge light) that the problem probably *is* with the battery, rather than the brand new charger.
5. I drive very slowly back to Bunnings.

6. I return the charger, buy a battery, and pay the difference. The friendly staff member and I laugh at Murphy's Law, saying that of course we should have expected that the problem would be with the most expensive part.
7. I drive home very slowly.
8. I plug the battery into the charger and rejoice that now I'm getting flashing lights. My joy dissipates as I realise that synchronous flashing green and red lights indicates a "battery failure".
9. I drive very slowly to Bunnings - feeling pleased that today is my day off, so it doesn't matter so much if I spend all day fixing what should be a quick fix.
10. I tell the staff member that I hope she doesn't think I'm stalking her. She laughs, tests the battery, agrees that it has failed, and swaps it out for one that isn't broken. I tell her that I imagine she hopes she won't see me again. She tells me that she has enjoyed seeing me three times.
11. I drive home very slowly.
12. I plug the new battery into the charger and almost cry when a charging light shines like a beacon of victory.



Thought starters:

A. Was this a wasted day? It certainly was an expression of how "simple things" can often become "complicated things" (or at least time-consuming things). But it wasn't a wasted day, because I had some fun interactions with someone whom I otherwise would not have met. She told me some things about her life; and it was good to hear, at the end, that she'd enjoyed our interaction. What is a wasted day?

B. It was an illustration that many problems are not such that they can be solved immediately. Sometimes, when we have a significant problem, we need to accept that significant solving is going to be required. Does one stop smoking with one simple effort? Does one stop drinking in a single day? Can broken friendships be restored in twenty minutes? When we reach the end of the first day of engagement with a problem, we can forgive ourselves for needing a second day.

C. At one point within the slow journeying between Papanui and Bunnings, it crossed my mind that I was grateful that I had a car and was legal to drive it. Had I been doing this thing while depending on buses or volunteer chauffeurs, it would have been unmanageable. Among the traffic cones and low velocity, a wee awareness of a blessing presented itself.

D. Problems with toilet seats and drill batteries are nothing when compared with what the people of Ukraine, Gaza, Minneapolis are facing. As people of ordinary life and smaller challenges, called to pray for the grave needs of the world, how do we keep perspective?

Blessings on your problem solving,

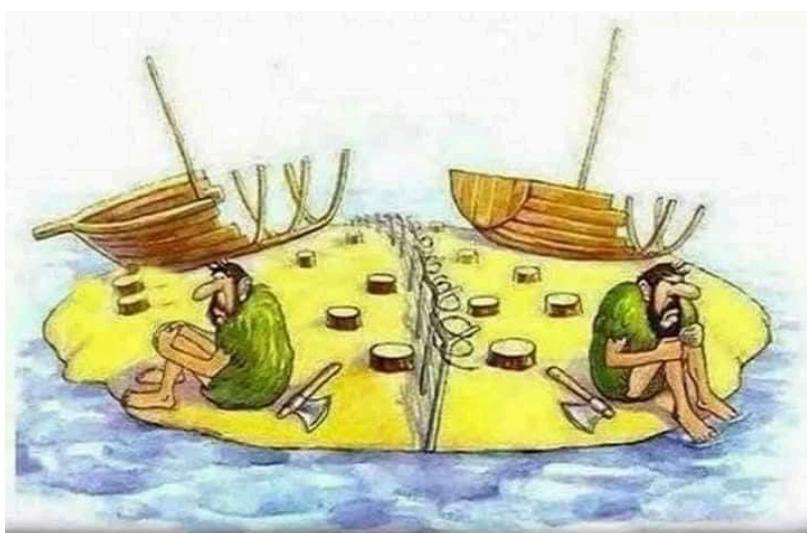
Matthew.

Prayer and Action

Rev Joseph Yoo, is a one-time United Methodist minister, now an episcopal priest ministering in Texas in the United States. His profile describes him as speaking from a Korean American perspective. He has spoken extensively about the Christian church's reaction to his autistic son, hitting back at suggestions that his son needs "healing". He speaks here, though, about a wee line that might lie between prayer and action. Joseph says:



There is something deeply hypocritical about praying for a problem you are unwilling to resolve. You pray for a job, but you never send out an application. That's not prayer, that's procrastination. You pray for a broken relationship, but you never make that phone call. That's not prayer, that's avoidance. You pray for the hungry to be fed, but you never give or volunteer. That's not prayer, that's performance. You pray for World Peace but never practised peace-making in your own life. That's not prayer, that's wishful thinking. . . . Prayer is never just words; it's always two parts. We pray and then we act. You pray for strength, then you step into the hard thing that scares you. You pray for forgiveness, then you change your behaviour. You pray for healing, then you actually go to the doctor or therapy, or do the work of recovery. And that's why it's always so enraging when politicians offer thoughts and prayers every time these masked tragedies happen - because they have the power to act, to change laws, to fund solutions, address the culture of violence - and then the excuse is "guns aren't the problem, people are". As my friend Nacho once said, "then why are we letting people have guns?" Anyway, prayer was never meant to be the end of the sentence. It's the beginning. We pray and then we move. Otherwise our prayers are just hollow words echoing in the dark.



Tautahi, after whom we get the city name, Ōtautahi, lived out on Banks Peninsular. He used to come over here to catch fish and birds. Rumour has it that his people thought the wet marshlands here were not a good place to live (crazy to build a settlement on a swamp), but it was a great place to find food. Christchurch City Council's Newsline (27 August 2025), suggests that some of the Red Zone is reverting to its rich past.

Native birds flocking to the red zone

The Ōtākaro Avon River Corridor's (OARC) first wetland is becoming a haven for native wildlife, with new bird species flocking in to nest. Regular bird monitoring at the Waitaki Street wetland is showing an increase in bird numbers and species richness, and Christchurch City Council Ecologist Andrew Crossland says the wildlife diversity is continuously improving.

The two-hectare wetland was created earlier this year after the Council removed sheet metal pilings north of Pages Road Bridge at Waitaki Street, allowing tidal river waters to flow into low-lying areas. The site provides a rich habitat for the natural regeneration of native plants and the feeding, roosting and nesting requirements of birds.



Mr Crossland says the habitat is developing exactly as it should, with vegetation transitioning from submerged exotic grasses and weeds into saltmarsh within the basin, and ephemeral ponds along the old street alignments creating the ideal environment.

“This is the perfect wet, marshy habitat for native water birds, and we’re now seeing several species coming in to roost in preparation for spring. “Spur-winged plovers are already nesting in the areas, and native black-billed and red-billed gulls are showing interest in the stoney islands.

“We’re expecting pied-stilts to be nesting on the islands soon as groups have been showing pre-breeding behaviours, and we may see native waterfowl coming in too.” With the birds establishing at this new site, Mr Crossland urges residents to protect the breeding grounds.

“Loud noises including motorbikes and fast e-bikes passing through the area can disturb the wildlife - as can dogs running off lead. So we’re asking residents to please take care when travelling nearby.”

Over the summer months, minor landform modifications will smooth off the old stopbank to give it a more natural shape, improving its suitability for roosting further. The wetland will naturally re-establish native vegetation, with salt-tolerant indigenous marsh plants expected to come through in spring. The downstream edge of the tidal wetland will continue to transform over the next two to three years as the marsh regeneration occurs.

Talanoa, Faith, and Remembrance: A Pacific Lens on Trans Awareness Week

By Alfie Prasad



Knox Church: Faith Meets Inclusion

The following day, **Sunday, 16 November**, Knox Church opened its doors and hearts for a service that will be remembered for years to come. The remembrance segment of the service was led by **Dr Penni Wolfgramm** and myself, the congregation leaned in with grace and reverence as we marked **Trans Day of Remembrance**.

The pews were full, the hymns soared, and the spirit of inclusion was palpable, so much so that this very Palagi



congregation sang in honour 'O le Fa'afetai', a traditional Samoan hymn. Knox Church did not just host a service—they created a sacred space where faith and love walked hand in hand with justice and dignity. In a world where religion is often weaponised against rainbow communities, this service was a beacon of hope—a declaration that God's love knows no bounds. Special tribute is paid to Rev. Dr. Matthew Jack and the amazing leadership of Knox Church, as well as the mighty heartbeat of Rainbow+ communities in Ōtautahi – Moana Vā, whose collaboration, fa'aaloalo and heart advocate for Pacific Rainbow+ communities in the heart of Southland.

Re-examining Christian Values - an Interview with John Fugelsang

Te Reo Irirangi o Aoteroa's Jesse Mulligan interviewed John Fugelsang a while back about a book John recently wrote: *Separation of Church and Hate: A Sane Person's Guide to Taking Back the Bible from Fundamentalists, Fascists, and Flock-Fleecing Frauds*.

<https://www.rnz.co.nz/national/programmes/afternoons/20251118>

Covering similar themes, the Guardian published an article by Bill McKibben, the Schumann distinguished Scholar at Middlebury College, Vermont.

<https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/ng-interactive/2025/nov/23/america-christian-evangelical-discrimination-immigration>

No to commandments, yes to love

Angi Sullins

I never asked you
to carry the commandments
like a sack of stones,
to straighten your spine
into someone else's idea of holy.
I asked you to lean in,
to press your ear
to the tender heartbeat
of the world,
to hear Me pulsing
in the cry of the child,
the whisper of the wind,
the laughter between lovers
who were never
supposed to love.
Your soul's salvation
was never about
getting it right.
It was never about
the perfect prayer,
the clean hands,
the pure thoughts.
Beloved—
it was always about
how your heart broke
open
for someone else.
The rule is love.
The only rule
is love.
And if the laws you've been taught
do not sing with mercy,
if they crush the soft bloom
of another's becoming
then break them.

Break them
like I broke the Sabbath,
like I broke the silence
to lift the woman from the dust,
to touch the leper,
to dine with the forgotten.
Break them
like bread.
Do you not see?
Every time you choose love
over correctness,
compassion
over fear,
you are already saved.
Not in some distant heaven,
but now
as your tears fall
for another's pain.
Now—
as you laugh
at your own clumsy devotion.
I am not keeping score.
I am tracing the curve of your soul
like a mother studies her child's face.
I am sitting beside you
in the mess.
In the beauty.
In the breaking.
In the becoming.
And I am whispering
You are mine.
You are mine.
You are mine.

Chris Clarke, CEO of the Wilberforce Foundation

"I've been thinking" on The Panel,
Te Reo Irirangi o Aotearoa,
12 December 2025

I caught up with a friend this morning, and once we got through normal catching up about family and friends and so on, we started lamenting the state of politics, discourse, culture wars - a fairly familiar kind of conversation; except he stopped me part way through and he said "so Chris, when was the last time you changed your mind about anything?" And it got me thinking, I didn't have an answer for it. And I thought, actually I'm as much the problem as the problem that we're identifying - which is about polarisation, culture wars, people taking position, difficulty actually about having conversation these days because you might trigger somebody or trigger something. But then I thought, actually, yeah, when did I change my mind as a consequence of what someone said?

And here's the thing: I started to think about when did I last read a book that actually I knew I'd disagree with? Or when was the last time I listened to a song that was outside my range of songs that I normally listen to? Or when was the last time I went to a movie and it wasn't just about being entertained? Actually, I'm losing my sense of curiosity; and if I'm losing my sense of curiosity, I suspect I'm not alone. And what does that mean to us as a nation, as a society, when we stop being curious?

I think Oscar Wilde once said that consistency is the last refuge of the unimaginative. And I'm left there and thinking, I fear I have lost my imagination. So, the question for all of us is "when was the last time we changed our mind?"



Interview with James Doty

A friend of mine who is a psychiatrist and published author on "Buddhist compassion" recently posted notice of the death of one of his most significant mentors, Professor James Doty. Shortly before his death, Professor Doty gave an interview, talking about his origins and why compassion became such a key concept in his thinking and practice.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vA3A6TsJRpk>

From the "Encyclopedia of Alternative Facts"

Frankenstein was the monster's name.
There's no such thing as climate change.
A solero is a type of hat.
The planet is not round but flat.

Six is the legal drinking age.
Women are paid an equal wage.
Elvis was influenced by Take That.
The planet is not round but flat.

Achilles had a dodgy knee.
Terror comes from refugees.
Insomnia affects most cats.
The planet is not round but flat.

There are no fascists on the rise.
A politician never lies.
It's impossible to change a fact.
The planet is not round but flat.

Brian Bilston (b. 1970)

40 People Missing After First Flat Earth Surfing Championship



I hope this email finds you well

When I say, “I hope this email finds you well,” what I mean is this: I hope you get to drink your coffee before it gets cold. I hope you’re in a sweet season of life. I hope you witness a miracle. I hope something good happens to you. I hope you see a dog. I hope you’re quick to remember grace. I hope you choose beauty over bitterness. I hope you hear *Africa* by Toto while caught in traffic—or *Sk8r Boi* by Avril Lavigne. I hope you cling to mercy. I hope you keep going. I hope you rest. I hope the weather is beautiful. I hope someone smiles at you for no reason except joy. I hope the quiet feels like peace, not loneliness. I hope your heart softens instead of hardens. I hope you come to believe this life is a gift, not a burden—and that you, too, are a gift, not a burden. Yes, I hope this email finds you well. And if it doesn’t—I hope it sits with you there, gently, and refuses to let you go unseen.

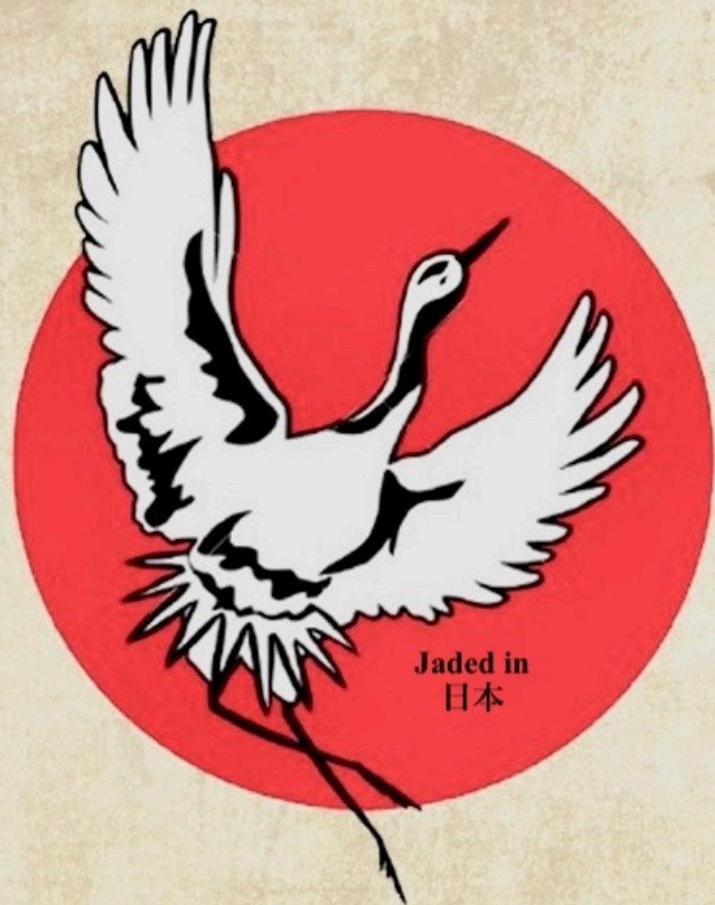
Video Links

On Sunday 11 January, I framed our service around an edited video clip featuring Bob Mortimer and Paul Whitehouse. Bob and Paul talked about loss, friendship, and life as a gift. While my edit of the video clip was only seven minutes long, the unedited original, 9 minutes version, can be found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wSUs29MhBWo>

The full Stevie Wonder interview, around which I framed our services on Sundays 18 and 25 January and Sunday 1 February, can be found at:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WSjVcoSKL5s&t=1s>



“We’re fools whether we dance or not,
so we might as well dance.”

踊っても、踊らなくても、お愚かなら、踊った方がいい。

LENT AND HOLY WEEK, 2026

SIX STORIES OF JESUS AND THE STONES

Lent 1 - 22 February

High rocks and stumbling blocks



Psalm 40 speaks of God providing a high rock upon which the person of faith can see into the distance clearly. Rock solid. 1 Corinthians 1:20-25 speaks about how the great rock of God became a stumbling block. Jesus becomes the stone that the builders rejected. Lent will be a season of stumbling in the company of the rising one.

Lent 2 - 1 March February

White-washed tomb stones



Frustrated by the incessant opposition of the Pharisees, who pose holiness in public, but reject his ministry of freedom and life, Jesus calls them "white washed tombs" - outwardly clean but inwardly dead. We explore themes of hypocrisy, and receive communion as those called to inner truth and renewal.

Lent 3 - 8 March

Two stoning stories



In the first stoning story, Jesus confronts a crowd of those who are keen to stone a woman to death, since she has been found in sin. Jesus asks the one without sin to cast the first stone. In the second story, Jesus himself is the target for a crowd with stones in their hands. Somehow he walks right through it. We wonder about the freedom of Jesus to undo the stone-holding hands. We take a few stones in our possession home to release.

Lent 4 - 15 March

Sinking stones rising



In Luke 17: 1-2, we find Jesus saying that it were better for those who harm the "little ones" to tie a millstone around their necks and be thrown into the sea. We consider our various stones of drowning weight. In Matthew 14: 22-33, we find Peter sinking in the sea, only to be raised up and helped. Jesus rescues the sinking one. Is he the one to remove the millstone from the human neck?

Lent 5 - 22 March

You are the rock, but also not



In Matthew 16: 13-20, as the disciple Simon declares Jesus to be the Christ, Jesus responds by calling him "Peter", which means "rock". Peter the rock then immediately expresses a great error in his understanding of Jesus. We explore our life as those in possession of great spiritual truth but also grave error. In 1 Peter 2: 1-5, we are called to allow ourselves to become living stones in God's new temple. How can we gift our imperfect faith for God's temple?

Palm Sunday - 29 March

If people are silent, the stones will sing



As he enters Jerusalem, where he will be condemned by the crowds and the authorities, some tell his supporters to be quiet. Jesus' response is to say that should his supporters be silent, the stones on the ground will take up the song of praise.

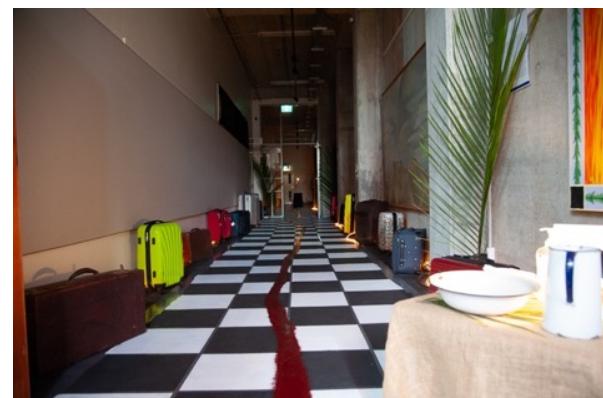
A line in our closing hymn, Lift high the cross, goes "if we are silent, even stones cry out".

When humanity loses its voice, could the rest of creation insist on praising God?

Holy Week

Tuesday 31 March - Thursday 2

April



The Lenten Way

Te Ara Tapu

An Installation Artwork for Holy Week

Pete Majendie

In the Knox Centre Chapel

Open for viewing

Tuesday 31 March - Thursday 2 April,
9:00am - 12 noon.

The artist will be present on Tuesday and
Wednesday, 7:00pm - 9:00pm

Tenebrae Service

Thursday 2 April, 7:00pm
(also in the chapel)

Good Friday - 3 April
Roll the stone across the door



A sombre reflection on death and dying. The huge stone (which mourners fear they won't be able to remove) becomes a symbol for all that has sought to block Jesus' work of love and grace. On Good Friday, as a line is drawn under Jesus's life, the weight of the stone seems to be the greatest power in Creation.

EASTER, 2026

Easter Day - 5 April
The power that rolled the stone away



The service begins with a reflection and Matthew's telling of the Resurrection (where a considerable question is "how will the women access the tomb, given the large stone placed across its door?") Reflecting on Paul's famous claim of faith that "nothing can separate us from the love of God in Jesus Christ our Lord" [Romans 8: 35-39], we rejoice in the rolling aside of one or two legendary stones. We can't do the rolling ourselves, but we rejoice that the God of Easter does.



Thanks to Bronwyn H for our lovely 2025 Christmas tree, and thanks to our secret tree decorators.

This is Aotearoa

"This is Aotearoa" is an online project that resembles "Humans of New York City", in that it asks open questions of "random people around town".

Something of an aural history exercise, it has no political or cultural agenda. It simply gathers the reflections of ordinary people. Here is Jaydon.

"Something I didn't want to do, like really didn't want to do ages ago, was at my Dad's funeral in 2020; I was asked to speak by my mum. And that wasn't an easy thing for me to do. But I knew if I didn't do it, it would be something I would regret for the rest of my life. So I ended up doing it and immediately after, I felt better.

And from then on, any time I've had to speak at something very important, like a family funeral or at a wedding or something, I never pass up on the opportunity. Because even though I don't want to do it, for someone it would mean a lot.

Really, it was my mum. So the day [Dad] passed away, she signed a lease to a building that would eventually become her business. The one thing that kept her going and stuff, in terms of running her business was, it's what my dad would have wanted. She says that if my dad passed away before she signed the lease, she wouldn't have done it. So yeah, it's really my mum. She's one of the people that, if it has to be done, it'll be done. While it sucks that my father passed away, she knew that she was the only provider of the house from then on and she had to keep going.

I'm really proud of my mum because no matter how tough things in life get, whether it's a big issue or a little issue, she just keeps going. And it's helped me with some stuff in my life, especially with school. I look at her as kind of like an example."

Jaydon



A piece of paper tucked into a Bible

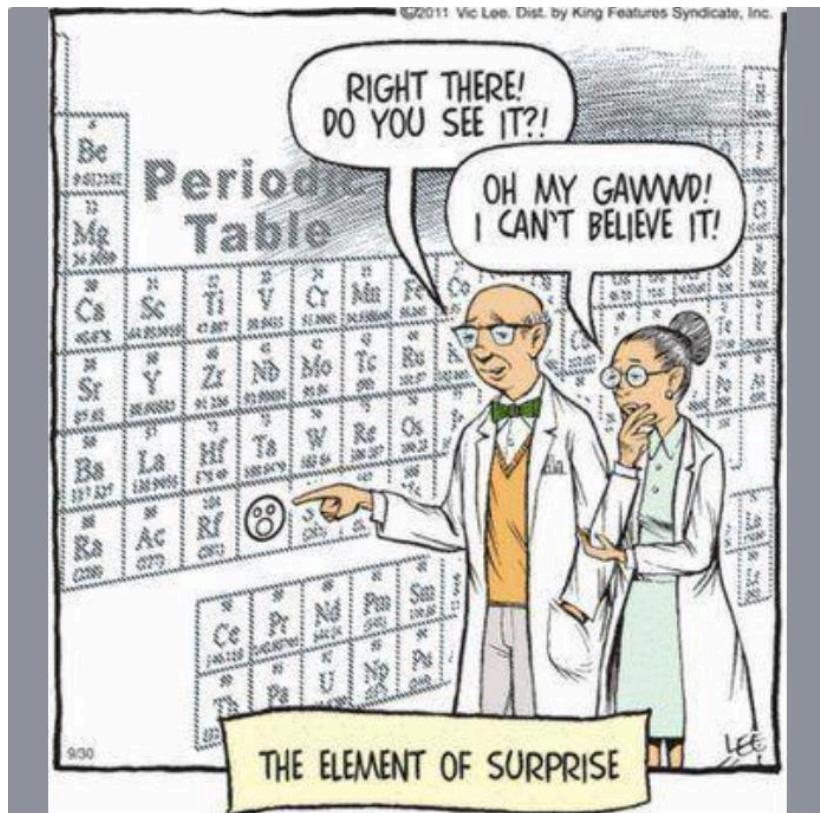
One Knox person has a copy of this devotion, which she keeps tucked inside her Bible - and it gives her encouragement in times of difficulty. She agreed to let me include it in this pastoral newsletter. We don't know where it comes from. It's been in her Bible for too long for her to remember!

You Are

You are the everlasting arms that hold me
You are the unworldly peace that calms me
You are the heavenly wings that heal me
You are the bread of life that feeds me
You are the tower of refuge that hides me
You are everlasting light where sorrow ends for me
You are the love banner flying over me
You are the hiding place to protect me
You are the one who lifts my eyes and helps me
You are the sleepless one who's always with me
You are a still small voice and an ear that's never deaf to me
You are the joy that fills the very heart of me
And you say 'I am who I am', Father, Son and Spirit, to me.

On a recent trip to Bangladesh,
a colleague spotted a few signs.





Material for Knox Life

If you have any material you think might go well into the next edition of Knox Life, just send it to the office. The deadline for contributions will be advertised through the Sunday notices for a few weeks before the deadline.

Arohanui, Matthew.

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