

In old age some of us will suffer from dementia. How can we in this state continue to follow Jesus on the 'way'? Perhaps we can stay connected to the church through familiar music and the actions of the worshipping and serving community. Whether we can or not, I believe that those with dementia are particularly loved and held by God. We are all members of the body of Christ, who in sickness and health are *together* engaged in and contributing to the work of Christ.

There is an evening hymn (translated by Geoffrey Laycock):

*The setting sun now dies away,
And darkness comes at close of day,
Your brightest beams, dear Lord impart,
And let them shine within our hearts.*

Some Christians, towards the end of their lives, no longer have many words to say, but reveal in their faces the light of Christ that burns in their hearts.

Where are we going? To death? To life? I don't know. What matters is our choice of the road, the way we travel. As disciples and members of the church we are called to follow Jesus along risky and unexpected ways in the power of the Spirit. Let us therefore step out of our comfort zones and put aside our cherished set ideas so we can freely and better serve and love others different from ourselves - *and* be open to receive from them. Then we will surely travel with Jesus who is "the way, and the truth and the life" (John 14:6).

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Where are We Going?



There are times when we stop and ask ourselves, "Where are we going as individuals and as a church congregation?"

Jesus said, "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me." (Luke 9:23)

Jesus' disciples were not told where they were going, only to *daily* follow Jesus by denying themselves and taking up their cross. When we get older, we experience frustrations and limitations as our bodies become physically weaker. It is not always *us* denying ourselves and taking up our cross, but rather our aged body removing our choices, and others thrusting a painful cross on our shoulders!

Some of us need sticks to prevent us from falling over, and no longer have the freedom to drive ourselves where we want to go! If we are members of an ageing church congregation we also need propping up at times, and the help of

others to assist us in following Jesus. Our control over our lives is slipping away!

As members of Christ's body, the church, no matter whether we are young or old, sick or well, we have a vocation to spread the reign of God on earth. That is, we are called to be Christ revealing God's love to others *daily*.

"How can we do that?", we might whimper. "We are past our use-by date, and already doing all we can." I suggest there are two obvious and interconnected ways of responding to God's call - by receiving and giving.

There are times when we all need to be open to receiving care from others. Jesus appreciated Mary lovingly massaging his feet with oil (John 12:3). Later he needed help from a stranger, Simon of Cyrene, to carry his cross (Luke 23:26). As followers of Jesus, we are to make our essential needs known, and when help is offered, to accept it gratefully.

Giving and receiving help is a two way action. We may know how a task might be performed safely and easily, but cannot physically do it. When we offer our knowledge and another offers their physical strength, we both together achieve a positive outcome. By discussing the problem between us, we may even arrive at an improved solution. We show God's love to others when we respect their opinions, are willing to try their ideas and encourage them in what they do.

In the church we can be guided by the way Simeon and Anna recognised the baby Jesus, rejoiced at his presence, and amazed Joseph and Mary (Luke 2:33). Elderly people have an important place in the congregation and so have the

young. We need people of all ages in the church so that all can be enriched by mutually giving and receiving gifts.

As disciples, we are called to give what we have to assist others. Even when we are not very mobile and our brains are slower to work, we can still be interested (but not interfering) in our family, our local church and the world. During a conversation we might sensitively draw on our wisdom, gained from experience, and not leave it like some old machine in the corner of a paddock to rust away. Listening to others may take an effort but it is valuable in showing them God's love. When a tired Jesus was sitting at a well in Samaria, he engaged in conversation with a woman and listened to her. This casual meeting had unexpected results. (John 4)

For us who have reached 'retirement', we have time to indulge in reading, thinking, writing *and* action, not just talking, watching television, day-dreaming and sleeping. We have opportunities to step back a little and try to understand what is behind conflicts between the people we care about. As we do this we are to be mindful of respecting others and avoiding gossiping about them. It is no good being like an old large spreading tree that promises shade, and then drops dead limbs on those who come to shelter under it!

During our Christian life, our relationship with God develops. At a time of less physical activity we have the opportunity to reveal God's love through prayer. When we pray for others, let us do so with our whole being, holding them in God's love. Sometimes we might be drawn to pray for them for many days, or even years. As followers of Jesus, who did not give up loving people no matter what they did, we cannot give up.