

TRANSCEND: MAY

Ascot Vale Uniting Church Newsletter 2014

60 Maribyrnong Road, Moonee Ponds

An Easter riddle: did Jesus rise from the dead?

I was very upset. My Mom and Dad had just told me that there was no Santa Clause. I was eight years old. My children who are smarter than me had already figured it out by that age. I was devastated as I looked down at the green peas on my dinner plate and contemplated what life would now be; no magic, no surprises, no margin of mystery lifting the drudgery of the everyday?

Eventually I got on with it. My parents helped me to recover and face reality without Santa. I felt re-assured and safe in their love; and grateful in the knowledge that it was really they all along who had done the hard work every Christmas of putting out presents and filling our stockings. And above all I am grateful for this: my parents were honest and caring in telling me the truth about Christmas. In doing so they saved me from a life of escapism and fantasy, unreality and false hope.

To be honest I view some claims by clergy that the empty tomb and Jesus' bodily resurrection were objective historical facts as acts of immaturity and uncaring- a lack of pastoral care. False hope is no hope at all, and when that hope is seen to be false it can embitter one's spirit forever. It's a pastoral relationship- Christian fellowship- that provides security and strength. It helps people to face realities like death.

What about Easter and the central idea that many Christians fiercely guard: that on the third day Jesus was bodily raised from the dead? If you challenge this you better wear body armour. Yet can we break the code of silence and have a conversation? And can we name our truth, any truth, as having limits based on our subjective view of ultimate reality? Our Christian faith lays this duty upon us: that we humbly and sensitively speak our truth in love to each other, without fear of condemnation or censure. So here we go.

There is room at the inn

The basic starting point is that we Christians all believe that there is something greater than death and the grave- it's God's love and eternal presence. But there is room in Christianity for both the Biblical literalist who believes in the bodily resurrection of the dead, as well as the liberal Christian who takes these stories seriously but as symbols, not literally. I'm in the latter group. Both views are acceptable. We are not saved by having the right beliefs; we are all saved 'by grace working through our faith'. God speaks to each of us in ways that we can understand and that we interpret with our subjective mind.

I was raised in a fairly literal Christian home. I then went to a Methodist seminary regarded as just to the left of centre theologically, but far from radical. The ideas that we are about to look at were a basic part of my theological and Biblical training. I naively assumed that would be so for other Christian ministers.

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Services:
Sundays at
10am

1-4	From The Minister
4	Worship Themes
5	Coming Events Kid's Church Calling Musicians
6	Happy Birthday Peter Mac.
7	Walk for Justice Free Hairdressing
8	Easter Sunday
9	Life's Journey
10	Social and Environmental Justice Report
11	Strange facts about the Bible Book Review
12	Lighthouse Regiment

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Rev. Ron Rosinsky

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Looking back now on the sermons that I listened to during my child-hood, almost all of them emphasized a literal understanding of the Bible. During that season of my life as an anxiety ridden teenager, that kind of faith gave me some comfort. But in the end it was unsustainable because to me it was unbelievable.

Three insights from that period:

- Christian teaching that is dogmatic and literal, which reads the Bible like a science book and does not separate the Christian message from the prescientific world-view of the ancients, is like a false God to be worshipped. It forces us to become first century pretzels. We have to believe every story exactly as it is written to feel like we are 'Bible believing Christians'.
- If I suffer from a feeling of inner distress or disintegration, or emotional turmoil, the temptation is great to hold fast to clear un-ambiguous teachings. They provide certainty. Think about it: those who suffer from a pre-existing state of inner distress are more prone to addictive behaviour. But in the film 'The Weatherman', Nicholas Cage's character makes a comment about 'fast food' applicable to a literal reading of the Bible: 'it's easy, it tastes all right, but it doesn't provide you with any real nourishment.'
- *Let us redefine 'Biblical literacy'.* It doesn't mean knowing every Bible passage by memory, nor does it mean taking a purely textual approach where we merely read the words of a passage. *Biblical literacy means understanding the cultural and historical context of the Bible and its symbols, and knowing the Bible's central messages and values.* For example, belief in the bodily resurrection of the dead was important to pious first century Jews. Why? It's essential to know if one is to understand what the resurrection meant. This is where some clergy retreat to a brand of anti-intellectualism claiming that the Bible says what it says, nothing more.

A Christian who disregards or refuses knowledge of basic historical facts related to the Bible, is like a brain surgeon who refuses to study human anatomy and doesn't know where the brain goes. Biblical literacy is long overdue. It's a matter of will not a matter of incomprehensible theology.

Did Jesus rise from the dead? A Biblical approach

- Limiting God's power?

What does Jesus' bodily resurrection from the dead prove? God's power. It shows God triumphing over death and the grave; that God's life and power have defeated the forces of sin and destructiveness at Easter. *But notice that all of this, especially God's power and adaptability after tragedy, is shown decisively by the existence of the early church, without need of a physical resurrection of Jesus' body.*

To use the Christmas analogy Santa Claus was a symbol, he was not the vehicle for me to experience God's love and generosity. It was my parents. The empty tomb at Easter was but one powerful expression or symbol of God's creative triumph over destructiveness. Incidentally the empty tomb stories came quite late into the Easter tradition. Paul doesn't mention them once because they weren't around in his day.

Through the earliest decades after Jesus' crucifixion, which we now call Easter, I think 'the resurrection' for believers was something like this: a deathless Jesus was known to his followers even in the tiny and fearful moments of their existence, 'in the breaking of the bread' near Emmaus; to Paul as a heavenly vision on the Damascus road; and to Peter and Mary and to many others who when facing their own death and persecution looked to God, saw the face of Jesus, and were inspired.

This I believe is the original meaning of resurrection. It's supported by the Koine Greek language of the New Testament: Jesus was not raised from death back to this life, but 'exalted', raised to 'be at God's right hand', 'not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption' (Acts 2: 31, 33, 32) Here is a Jesus that lives on, continues to grow, stronger than death and persecution. Supporting this is Paul's most categorical statement on the matter, probably referencing his own vision of the risen Christ:

"So it is with the resurrection of the dead...it is sown a physical body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a physical body then there is also a spiritual body." (1 Corinthians 15: 42, 44)

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Making God conform

Making God conform to our own image of power and for our own comfort equals idolatry, worship of a false god. Jesus condemned that notion of an interventionist God who occasionally breaks the laws of physics and biology to make miraculous things happen. The temptations of Christ showed this dramatically. Jesus refused to do magic tricks to get people to believe in him. He wouldn't turn stones into loaves of bread, nor would he throw himself down from the temple so that angels would catch him.

Why limit God's power by insisting that creation occurred in only six days? Evolution over 15 billion years is also an impressive display of God's directing and creating activity. Similarly why limit God's power to an empty tomb on Easter morning when his power is shown to be enduring without the use of supernatural occurrences. God's power is more subtle than we like.

- **'The Bible says': text and historical context** The Bible is not a book of history. It's a story of God's love for us through time interpreted and written by humans. Easter stories and other Biblical stories alike are examples of ancient storytelling; full of some history, lots of religious symbols and words, and lots of legendary heroes and tales- one part history and two parts imagination and interpretation. There's truth in it all but sometimes it's indirect.

The bodily resurrection of the dead: God's justice and vindication of the persecuted ones

This was the Jewish religious tradition of all the Gospel writers as they told the story of Jesus' execution. It said that God would vindicate those righteous Jews who remained faithful under persecution, and were ready to die as martyrs for their faith in God. Nearly six hundred years before Jesus, elements of bodily resurrection of the persecuted dead can be found in Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones. (Ezekiel 37: 1-14)

Written just after the capture and destruction of Jerusalem in 587 BCE, this oracle might be the earliest example in Jewish literature of a precursor to the Christian doctrine of resurrection. The bones in the valley are the Jewish exiles, dead and alive, who have no more hope of resuscitating the kingdom of Israel than of putting flesh on a skeleton and calling it to life. But God vindicates them. How? By raising them back to life in a very palpable way: with flesh, sinew and skin being put onto their bones, then God breathes the breath of life into them so they may live.

As scholars have pointed out, the *specific* reason bodily resurrection became part of Jewish tradition was the problem of martyrdom in the face of evil triumphant. *During the period of the Greek -Seleucid persecution of homeland Jews in the 160's BCE the idea of bodily resurrection became prominent.* When God's future justice happened, when the great cleanup of the world occurred, the first order of business was the resurrection of the righteous dead. It was the sign that God's just and nonviolent earth was being born- the vindication of the martyrs who had given their lives for the cause. God would raise up their battered, tortured and executed *bodies* intact and whole, no longer disfigured but transfigured.

At the time of Jesus these ideas became crystallized in the teachings of the Pharisees; they became theological doctrine.

That doctrine was expressed in writings just before the time of Jesus:

- *Wisdom, chapters 2-5; and 2 Maccabees* (part of the Apocrypha of the Christian Bible); and
- *Daniel 12: 2-3*: this passage began the standard way of describing the righteous ones who had died before Jesus as 'having fallen asleep' awaiting resurrection for their suffering and tortured bodies. The Messiah would do this.

So for Christian gospel writers trained in this Jewish way of thinking, Jesus had to bodily rise from the dead to show God's vindication of him over his executioners. A bodily resurrection signalled that God's kingdom would reign supreme over all earthly empires. Jesus would rise and lead God's corporate vindication of all the righteous ones who had 'fallen asleep', who had lived for justice and died from injustice. They suffered the same destiny as Jesus.

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Who would you like to have following you?

I hope my children have learned a little something from the example that I have set, from my love for them and my values- from what I do. If they require further inspiration to do good, like me coming back from the dead, then I know I have failed as a parent, that my influence has not been lasting.

So it's lame when Christians effectively won't follow Jesus without his physical resurrection. What's more inspiring? To think that Jesus' disciples carried forward his message even in the face of certain torture and death because of their belief in him? Or that they were energized into action and belief only because they saw him alive after he was dead? 'Blessed are those who believe without seeing'. Why does one need life after death, an empty tomb, in order to follow Jesus, to enact his life and teachings, to be inspired? I thought he was inspiring enough.

The pink elephant in the argument

Upon death irreversible biological processes occur within the body- within every body; organs fail, systems shut down, flesh decays. Was it not so for Jesus? That's strongly denied. Many say that because Jesus was the true son of God he had God's power to do supernatural things that ordinary humans cannot do; and he proved this by rising from the dead.

The pink elephant at the heart of this argument is its circular reasoning. How do we get around the question of medical science, of human biology? A theological statement affirming Jesus' divinity cannot be used to get around it, to prove or disprove a disputed biological - medical question. The resurrection of Jesus is a Christian faith statement not proof positive of a medical fact. Did Jesus not take frail human flesh like us and thereby accept its physical limitations, including his mortality?

Whatever view you take of the resurrection of Jesus, I hope you will be inspired by the truth of Easter, that not even crucifixion and evil can defeat what God has to say to us about life and justice.

All the best, Ron Rosinsky

WORSHIP THEMES AND READINGS - Sundays 10.30am

4 May: Communion Celebration- *'The small moments that make or break us'*

Luke 24: 13-35- The walk to Emmaus

11 May: Mother's Day Celebration- *'Mothers: beyond narcissism and self pre-occupation'*

Acts 2: 42-47

18 May: *'After a disaster- having the courage to survive'* John 14: 1-14

25 May: Guest preacher, Reverend Keith Howden

Readings to be announced

1 June: **Communion Sunday**- Guest preacher, Reverend Keith Howden,

Readings to be announced

8 June: **Day of Pentecost** - *Theme: 'Life has more to it than any single experience has disclosed'* Acts 2: 1-21

Coming Events

Saturday May 3rd	Board Games Night
Sunday May 11th	Mothers Day
Sunday May 18th	Special Church Council Meeting following service to deal with Office Bearers & Ministry Placement
Saturday May 31st	Curry Night (Dine out) Details to be announced
Thursday June 5th	World Environment Day
Sunday June 8th	Thanksgiving Morning Tea
Monday June 9th	Queen's Birthday
Sunday June 15th	'Getting to Know You' morning tea hosted by Elders
Monday June 16th	Pentecost Study 7.30pm — 9pm at church. 'Original Blessing'
Sunday June 22nd	Refugee Sunday

KID'S CHURCH

Kid's Uniting re-commences on Sunday 27 April- and concludes on Sunday, 27 June

Secondary aged children: teachers, Noel, Claire and Ron

Topic: 'Civil disobedience and non-violence for social transformation'

Primary aged children: teachers, Claire and Bernadette

Topics: 'Women in the early church- radical equality'

'The Hebrew prophets- creativity and social justice'

Our teachers use the '*Godly Play- Montessori*' methods of teaching. This approach uses play to engage a child's imagination and empathy in the Biblical story.

Calling Musicians and Guitarists

Ascot Vale Uniting Church is currently recruiting musicians and guitarists to complement our band and music program, to play for Sunday morning services. We like to have fun, and play modern songs as well as some classical Christian hymns with a social justice focus.

We like creating good music.

Music helps bring meaning and hope to people's lives, it both consoles in times of sadness and inspires to action, and engages congregations in sacred moments where their faith is enhanced.

If interested please contact Maria: gumbyprickle@yahoo.com

"Self preservation is only the second law of life. The first law is that you and the other are one...

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. ...

I can never be who I ought to be until you become who you ought to be"

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

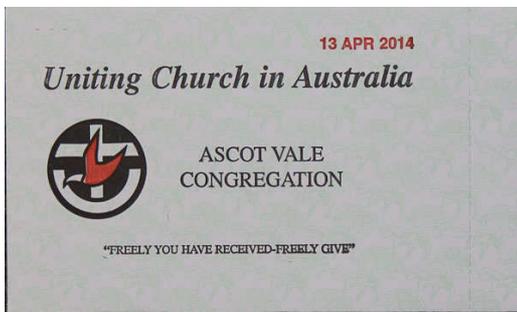


WISHING PETER A HAPPY BIRTHDAY

Peter Macdonald recently celebrated a significant birthday. The photo shows some of his church friends helping him celebrate.

Peter is a great servant of our church. He is Chairperson of the Elders and Church Treasurer.

On behalf of the congregation we extend to Peter our best wishes and our appreciation for all that he does for our church.



NEW OFFERING ENVELOPES

OFFERING ENVELOPES FOR THE PERIOD JUNE 2014 THROUGH MAY 2015 ARE NOW AVAILABLE ON THE FRONT TABLE AT THE ENTRANCE OF THE CHURCH.

PLEASE TAKE A SET, ALTERNATIVELY SEE MYSELF OR TED JENNINGS

PETER MACDONALD Treasurer

Aged Care Documents and Memorabilia

Do you have any historical documents that record in words, photographs or memorabilia, the historical background to the Uniting Church mission with older people?

As Uniting AgeWell approaches its 10th Anniversary they, along with the Uniting Church Archives, are interested to preserve the records of our past. People have already contributed existing histories, meeting minutes, denominational magazines and photos documenting our congregations', denominational and corporate history of care for older people from the 1940's until now.

As many of our aged care communities were founded by the faith, generosity and persistence of local congregations items of interest often reside with many individuals and former and present councils, boards and agencies of the church. We are aiming to have such items safely recorded and stored for future enquiry and research.

If you have anything you would like to contribute and to be considered for inclusion in the Uniting Church archives, please contact:

Rev John Clarke, Director of Mission, JClarke@unitingagewell.org

Walking for Justice for Refugees - Palm Sunday: April 13 2014



Ascot Vale Uniting was well represented among the thousands who took to the streets on Palm Sunday, throughout the country, to speak out against current refugee and asylum seeker policies.

Former Uniting Church President Rev Alistair Macrae addressed the crowd outside the State Library.

“On the original Palm Sunday Jesus came in peace into Jerusalem,” Mr Macrae said.

“The crowds were very noisy and his opponents asked him to tell them to be quiet and he replied ‘if my followers remain silent the very stones will cry out aloud.

“So we’re here today to make some noise and cry out loud for justice.”

“The policy of keeping asylum seekers offshore and remote is about keeping them out of sight and out of mind,” Mr Macrae said.

“We’re here today to say that they are insight and they are on our minds and so are our political leaders.”



HERE'S A GOOD OFFER! FREE HAIRDRESSING

Would you like an experienced and qualified hairdresser to cut your hair for free?

Our Iranian friend and fellow-parishioner Marjan is the hairdresser for you! As well as being a delightful person, she is a qualified and experienced hairdresser and beautician in her own country; but her visa conditions do not permit her to undertake paid work in Australia. She is keen to keep up her skills and to offer this free service to our parishioners, families and friends.

Just speak to her friend Nasrin, or to Dorothy, if you are interested.

EASTER SUNDAY 2014



Those at the service were invited to attach a flower to the cross.



Once again Judith's beautiful floral arrangements were a feature of the service.

Like to help out a bit?

How people have been helping.

Our church uses a lot of basic supermarket items such as biscuits, coffee (Fairtrade), long life milk, sugar, garbage bags, toilet rolls and cleaning items (Good Earth).

Can you assist by providing some of these goods?

If so, bring contributions of church supplies along to the church.

If you wish to be reimbursed, give the supermarket docket to our Treasurer Peter Macdonald.



LIFE'S JOURNEY

God crept silently
into my soul
and came knocking -
without recognition.
My life then unfolded -
like a page of gesso.
on my own creative book.
I became my palette,
of images and words.
Sculptured by a loving hand.
Leading myself to myself.
With Gods grace to guide me.



"All changes, even the most longed for, have their melancholy: for what we leave behind us is a part of ourselves; we must die to one life before we can enter another."

Part of my journey is accepting Gods path and that God is with me on this voyage.

The key ingredient for me is trust. Release your fears and all will be well.

I also feel that God has given me a life that I could not give myself. I feel very much that I am being led to palliative care as well as grief and loss counselling.

I feel I am walking on a path with people that incorporates a sense of change. For them as well as me. God and myself are in the renewal of this eternal connection.

The relationship with God is a very personal one.

I wish you all the best in the journey that is your life. God bless/Namaste.

Fiona P.

Going Out

A couple were going out for the evening. They got ready, all dolled up, cat put out, etc.

The taxi arrives and as the couple go out, the cat shoots back in. They don't want the cat shut in the house, so the wife goes out to the taxi while the husband goes upstairs to chase the cat out.

The wife, not wanting it known that the house will be empty, explains to the taxi driver, "He's just going upstairs to say goodbye to my mother."

A few minutes later, the husband gets into the cab: "Sorry I took so long," he says. "Stupid old thing was hiding under the bed and I had to poke her with a coat hanger to get her to come out!"

Sincere thanks to those who have contributed to this month's Transcend.
Contributions are always very welcome.

SOCIAL & ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COMMITTEE NEWS



1. Fund Raiser Film Night: What a great night! 25 parishioners and friends met at the “Sun” Theatre, Yarraville, on April 3rd to watch an exciting and thought-provoking film in good company, while contributing a very welcome \$300 for the Asylum Seekers Resource Centre.

“Noah” had something for everyone – action, adventure, romance, fantasy, and moral and psychological drama, as well as incredible scenery – yet it managed to remain remarkably faithful to the Biblical account. The film proved surprisingly appropriate for our group; the story was interpreted so that Noah became, in effect, the first conservationist; while at the same time he and his family might be seen as the first boat people! In short, a highly recommended experience.

The SEJC thanks everyone who attended, and also those generous people who could not attend but donated to the cause. Particular thanks to Claire Sidlow for her expert organisation of this very successful event.



2. Fair Trade Hot Drinks: Fair Trade is a scheme which guarantees coffee, tea and cocoa growers in developing countries a fair and reasonable price for their crops. The scheme is promoted by Oxfam. Before Fair Trade, many farmers in countries like Papua New Guinea, Ethiopia and Costa Rica were being paid only \$1.25 per kilo for their coffee – less than it cost to produce. (This amounted to 30c per cup of coffee for which you or I would pay \$3.50!)

As a result, parents had to take their children out of school, could not afford medical treatment for them, and often had to leave them behind in the care of grandparents while they went to seek work in the city.

Under the Fair Trade plan, farmers were paid \$3.36 per kilo – more than double what they were earning before.

This of course means better health, greater security and the possibility of an education, which is the key to improved living standards in the future.

We at the SEJC would like everyone at Ascot Vale Uniting to be able to be part of this scheme. Council has approved a plan to phase in the use of Fair Trade tea, coffee and drinking chocolate at morning tea after the service.

Once the stocks that were kindly donated previously have been finished, we hope to be serving Fair Trade. (Donations towards the purchase of these products will of course still be highly welcome).

So enjoy your after-service cuppa with the added satisfaction of knowing that it is helping some of the world's poorest people to provide a better future for their children!

Fair Trade tea and coffee for home use can be found on the shelves of the major supermarkets. We appreciate your support in this venture.

3. Next Meeting; The SEJC will meet next on Wednesday 7 May, at 3 pm, at 39 Monash Street Ascot Vale. If you are free, and have a concern for justice and/or the environment, do come.

If you aren't able to come at that time, but would like to be part of the group, please let me know and we will do our best to accommodate you. But even if you can't or don't want to attend meetings, you can still be part of the group, by speaking to Bob, Claire, Kali or me to tell us of issues or actions you think we should be interested in. We look forward to hearing from you.

Your friend in Christ, Dorothy Howes, Spokesperson, AVUC SEJC

STRANGE FACTS FROM THE BIBLE

King Solomon had 700 wives, 300 concubines, and 12,000 horses.

Noah was 600 years old when he built the ark, and 950 when he died. Genesis 7:6 and 9:29.

In ancient Israel, men sealed a deal by exchanging sandals. Ruth 4:7

After Moses was given the Ten Commandments, he wore a veil over his face because his skin was glowing. Exodus 34:33-35

Psalms 117 is the shortest book in the Bible with only two verses.

Adam was 930 when he died. Genesis 5:5

Lydia was a saleswoman (A seller of purple material). Acts 16:14

Did you know when Jesus died, saints rose from the dead and walked around Jerusalem? Matthew 27:

Animals have to answer to God, too! Genesis 9:5

Paul was beaten five times and shipwrecked three times. 2 Corinthians 11:24-25

The iron point alone on Goliath's spear weighed about fifteen pounds. 1 Samuel 17:7

The Gospel of Mark reveals that Jesus had brothers and sisters.

The term 'scapegoat' comes from the use of a goat that was to receive the sins of the people and be released into the wilderness. Leviticus 16:10

It didn't rain in the Garden of Eden. Water came up as a mist from the earth to water the ground. Genesis 2:5-6

Most of the plagues in Egypt were brought on with the staff God gave Moses.

Once, while Ezekiel was sitting in his house, a big hand picked him up by the hair of his head and took him somewhere between heaven and earth. Ezekiel 8:3

Elijah stretched himself over a widow's son three times to bring him back to life. 1 Kings 17:21



BOOK REVIEWS BY JEAN

David Livingston by Janet and Geoff Bengé

He was an early missionary and explorer in Africa mapping the country as he went along. As he travelled around the vast continent of Africa, he told the story of Jesus Christ and what He had done for each human being to bring them to Himself.

Eric Liddell by Janet and Geoff Bengé

This man was an Olympic athlete who honoured God by keeping the Lord's Day (Sunday) holy by refusing to train or race on that day. For this God honoured him by giving him a greater Olympic victory than the one he knocked back. Later he became a missionary to the people of China.

RON'S UNIFORM PLUMED HAT

Ron's army regiment is the Australian Lighthorsemen. They have a long and distinguished history.

The distinctive emu feathers have been proudly worn for many years.



There are a number of conflicting stories about how the emu feathers were added to the hat. We do know that they were first worn by the Queensland Mounted Infantry.

One account says that to become a member of the squad riders had to pluck a handful of feathers from an emu whilst on horseback.

Another is that a member of the squad shot an emu and they all then decorated their hats with a clump of feathers.

We do know that the Queensland Mounted Infantry were called out during the Great Shearer's Strike in 1891. They did a good job and as a result were permitted to wear the emu plumes as part of their uniform.

During the Boer War and in subsequent conflicts other mounted units adopted the plumes. They were eventually confirmed as part of the formal uniform.

"lest we forget"

*"They shall not grow old, as we that are left grow old,
Age shall not weary them nor the years condemn,
At the going down of the sun and in the morning,
We shall remember them"*

A PERPLEXING PUZZLE

Two friends have a nice meal together, and the bill is \$25

The friends pay \$15 each, which the Waiter gives to the Cashier

The Cashier hands back \$5 to the Waiter

The Waiter keeps \$3 as a tip and hands back \$1 each

So, the friends paid \$14 each for the meal, for a total of \$28. The Waiter has \$3, and that makes \$31.

Where did the other dollar come from?

Answer in next month's Transcend.