

This morning there is finally some warmth in the sun; I have been so cold since coming back from Australia! It is lovely to be back with you all in the villages, although I was very tempted to stay. As many of you know, it is hard to be separated from family. I did joke that I'd had to pay excess baggage bringing a suitcase of sunshine home with me, but sadly that sun only lasted a day back at the beginning of April!

Spending three months in one place really allows you to put down roots, and the people around Castlemaine in Victoria were so friendly and welcoming. The church I attended had a great music tradition, with a 4 part choir leading the worship, but shares the same challenges as we face here as well as the joys. I had a couple of breaks from the family, staying first in an Anglican Benedictine Community, where there was a beautiful peaceful garden area overlooking a large lake, then towards the end of my visit in a Cistercian Community where I was able to join in with the Daily Offices (times of worship and reflection) at regular intervals through the day, starting at 4am! The second Monastery was in the Yarra Valley, where so much wonderful wine comes from. It took an act of willpower not to go off tasting wines each day at a different winery! Sadly the total length of travel home also meant I was unable to bring any of the lovely wines home as it would have been confiscated at Kuala Lumpur on the 3 hour stop over! I'm sure they do this on purpose!!

While there, I read the Lent book recommended by the Diocese, published by the Australian Board of Mission, *The Imaginary Doorway* by Stephen Daughtery, illustrated by his wife Vanessa, which takes seven personal encounters with Jesus from the Gospels then retells the story from the perspective of the person whose life was changed through meeting Jesus. It really made me think! Whenever we read or hear a story, each of us hears it in our own way, shaped by our individual experience and character. This is clear in the Bible too, with the variations in the four Gospel accounts of the life of Jesus. Each writer tells the same story, but with their own unique slant on the events. We each have our own stories to tell, to share, but often shy away from doing so for many reasons but often through lack of self-confidence.

Story is embedded in Australian culture, through the Indigenous people, the original 'Australians'. There is a growing interest in their history – 'his story' – as the government seeks to make reparation for the years of abuse suffered by the Aborigines. Wherever I travelled I saw plaques acknowledging the 'original owners' of the land, for example the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung People, and on Australia Day there was an alternative celebration in the local park, staged by the indigenous people, with live music and story shared. It was great to see the families enjoying the entertainment and their picnics while learning about their history and culture from the 'Aunts and Uncles' there.

I also rediscovered the joy of driving! The roads are straight and smooth and you can drive for miles without seeing another vehicle (initially disconcerting with the thought, what happens if I break down?!) and the undulating landscape of the Victorian bush passes through incredible volcanic plains with ancient cones sprinkled on either side of the road, spectacular! Gum trees come in a variety of size and shade of green and the scent of eucalyptus after an overnight shower is intoxicating. The ocean on the Mornington Peninsula was another stunning setting, sunrise and sunset has an amazing clarity and the wildlife is stunning. I return refreshed, re-energised, happy to be back with you all, but missing my family too. Thank goodness for technology and the ability to video call!

Every blessing,

Helena