



# Hornsby Uniting Church

*Our Vision: To grow in Christ and share His love.*

**News for April 28, 2024**

*All you descendants of Jacob, honour him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!  
For he has not despised or scorned the suffering of the afflicted one;  
he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. - Psalms 22*

## A Growing Community

Based on John 15:1–8

Jesus' followers and friends were still uncertain about their safety. Some had to return to their homes, but others stayed in Jerusalem. They gathered together often and talked about Jesus.

"Jesus was so gentle," said someone in the corner of the room. "When he told stories to the children, you could see the love in his eyes."

From the other side of the room, someone else spoke, "O yes, his touch was enough to heal and bring great joy. The person had been blind since birth could see people walking for the first time."

Then Peter spoke, "My mother-in-law was healed by Jesus, too – in the early days. Jesus' way of healing and teaching has brought us together. We are connected through Jesus."

"You are right," came from someone at the table. "Jesus told us that would happen when he talked about the vine and branches. Jesus said:

'I am the vine. God is the gardener. In the vineyard full of grapevines, the gardener carefully cuts the branches so they will grow lots of grapes. That has already happened to my branches because I have taught you God's word.

'When a branch is broken from the vine, that branch cannot produce grapes. Stay connected to me just as the branches are connected to the vine. Then you will produce good works because we are joined together.

'Yes, I am the vine, and you are the branches. Stay connected to my teachings and me, so they become a part of you. Pray for what you need. God is pleased when we produce good works.'"

As the people looked around the room, they knew that they were each connected to Jesus, and they were connected through him to one another – a growing community.



Our morning worship service is videotaped each Sunday, and made available online later in the day.

You can join us at

<http://hornsby.unitingchurch.org.au/church-at-home.html>

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GOOD THING I FOUND YOU GIDEON ... IT SEEMS SOMEONE HAS BEEN HIDING ALL YOUR BIBLES IN HOTEL ROOMS

For many of us the mention of agape is related to God's love – It shows the relationship that should exist amongst Christians. *"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples if you love one another."* John 13:35

In the early 60s, Brother Andrew, a man from Holland, smuggled a load of Bibles in his VW across the Romanian border and past communist guards. He checked into a hotel and began praying that God would lead him to the right Christian groups - the ones who could best use his copies of the Scriptures.

That weekend Andrew walked up to the hotel clerk and asked where he might find a church. The clerk looked at him a little strangely and answered, "We don't have many of those you know. Besides you couldn't understand the language." "Didn't you know?" Andrew replied, "Christians speak a kind of universal language." "Oh, what's that?", asked the clerk. "It's called Agape." The clerk had never heard of it, but Andrew assured him. "It's the most beautiful language in the world."

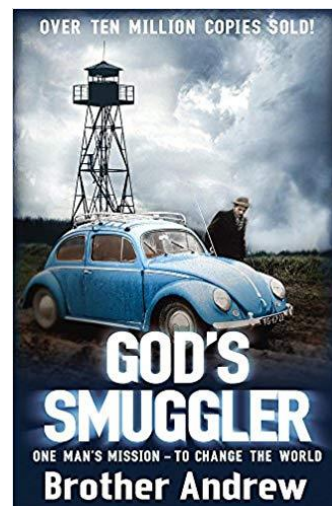
Andrew was able to locate several church groups in the area and managed to arrange a meeting with the president and secretary of a certain denomination. Unfortunately, although both Andrew and these men knew several European languages, they found they had none in common. So, there they sat staring at each other across the room. Andrew had travelled thousands of dangerous miles with his precious cargo but there seemed no way of telling whether these men were genuine Christian brothers or government informants.

Finally, he spotted a Romanian Bible on a desk in the office. Andrew reached into his pocket and pulled out a Dutch Bible. He turned to 1 Corinthians 16:20 and held the Bible out, pointing to the name of the book, which they could recognize. Instantly their faces lit up. They quickly found the same chapter and verse in their Romanian Bibles and read: "All the brothers here send you greetings. Greet one another with a holy kiss." The men beamed back at Andrew. Then one of them looked throughout his Bible and found Proverbs 25:25. Andrew found the verse and read: "Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land." These men spent half an hour conversing and sharing - just through the words of Scripture. They were so happy in this fellowship that crossed all cultural boundaries that they laughed until tears came to their eyes. Andrew knew he had found his brothers. When he showed them his load of Bibles, the Romanians were overwhelmed and embraced him again and again.

If you wish to enjoy more of this beautiful story, you may purchase the book called **God's Smuggler by Brother Andrews** That evening at the hotel, the clerk approached Andrew and remarked, "Say, I looked up 'agape' in the dictionary. There's no language by that name. That's just a Greek word for love." Andrew replied, "That's it. I was speaking in it all afternoon."

Agape love is the unconditional love of God for the lost world of sinners. You see God does not say, I will only love you if you do such and such, he loves us irrespective. The big difference when he requires something of us, is when he invites you to be his child or become part of his kingdom; seeks your acceptance of his FREE gift. Romans 10:9-10 states:

If you declare with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved. Agape love of God is yours if you accept it - it becomes a working relationship between you and God. May the Lord richly bless you. Philippians 2:1-2 *So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind.* **LET US SPEAK AGAPE!**



## IN PRAYER

Life-giving God, you have gifted each with the ability to love, yet there are times we fail to act in loving ways. We confess there are times we have not loved our neighbour as ourselves.

Instead, we have ignored, coveted, stolen from, and hurt those who live in community with us.

We confess there are times when we reject the love of others.

Instead, we have been too proud, too busy, too narrow-minded, too consumed with our own lives.

We confess there are times when we have not loved ourselves.

Instead, we have neglected our needs, denied ourselves forgiveness and grace, put others before ourselves in unhealthy ways. In each of these failures, we have distanced ourselves further from you, our creator and sustainer.

In confessing these things, we desire to give and receive love more honestly and to abide with you fully.

In times of sadness, loss, and disorientation,  
**we pray, Holy One, that you would abide in us.**

In times of anger, betrayal, and slander,  
**we pray, Holy One, that you would abide in us.**

In times of hopelessness, brokenness, and failure,

**we pray, Holy One, that you would abide in us.**

In times of hopefulness, renewed faith, and the assurance of the good yet to come,

**we pray, Holy One, that you would abide in us.**

In times of forgiveness, happiness, and thankfulness,

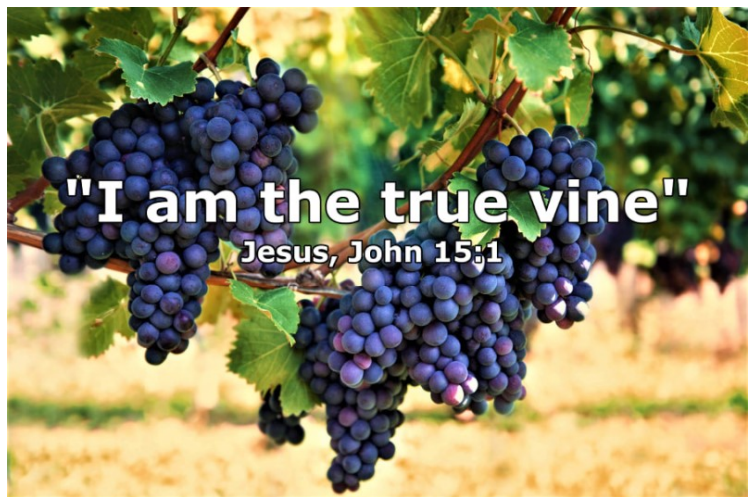
**we pray, Holy One, that you would abide in us.**

In times of joy, unity, and peace,

**we pray, Holy One, that you would abide in us.**

Your love, O God, is ever-present in our times of deepest despair as well as through the vastness of our praise. Your invitation to abide in you has no qualifications, but promises to be ever-close and ever-present when life is at its best, at its worst, and at every time in-between.

**Abide in us, Holy One, as we abide in you. Amen.**



**Do you need to contact someone? Have a support need?**

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