



Dear Friends,

Last weekend, Kathryn and I attended a weekend away with a Presbyterian church based in Canberra. We stayed at The Pines, a retreat center located at Tuross Head on the south coast, about five hours' away from Sydney (see photo). I was invited to do three talks from a sermon series I preached at RPC in 2022, Praying with Jesus in Luke's Gospel. Five people were also baptised at the beach, including four teens. Super exciting!

I enjoy church weekends away. They offer church communities the chance to hear from God's word, as well as spend some quality time to hang out. People eat, serve, swim, walk, play and sleep together. Older kids care for younger kids. There was the typical games night on the Saturday in which everyone, including the kids, could participate. We had time for long, leisurely chats.

I had been the church's caretaker pastor for two years while it was vacant and on the search for a new pastor. During that time, I got to know some of the people, as well as the church. So, I was interested to see what God had been up to for the past 13 or so years.

Firstly, I was encouraged that there were about 80 people across the age ranges, including lots of teens and younger kids. It's a sign of a healthy church when there are people from a wide cross-section of age ranges.

I was also pleased to get reacquainted with lots of people who I got to know during my time with them as their interim pastor. Like most churches, this one has been through its ups and downs. So, it's a sign of health when people remain committed to God's church. I keep saying one of the hardest things to do as a Christian is to belong to a local church and stick with it. It takes spiritual maturity to stay the course when a minister leaves or the church hits a rough patch.

Another sign of church health is that there are also new people regularly joining and choosing to stay. I met numerous people, most of whom had joined the church over the past eighteen months. They all spoke of how much they appreciated the faithful biblical teaching, the pastoral care and relationships within the church community.

The main highlight for me was sitting down with people to listen to their stories of God's work in their lives. They not only shared the highs, but the lows faced by any group of followers of Jesus Christ. They shared openly and honestly. There was no sugar-coating. But they also sought to trust God through the pain and difficulties. It made me wonder, if someone who hadn't been at RPC for at least ten years suddenly turned up for a church weekend away, what evidence would they find of God's work among us? And what are we like at sharing with one another where God is at work in our lives? Are you willing to share not just the highs, but the lows with fellow believers? God's word in 2 Corinthians 1:3-5 says:

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those who in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves receive from God. For just as we share abundantly in the sufferings of Christ, so also our comfort abounds through Christ.

God Bless,
Mark Adams