

Yes in God's Backyard (YIGBY)

(Sermon preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist on October 26th, 2025 – Luke 18:9-14 & Matthew 25:31-46)

Yes, in God's Backyard (YIGBY)

(Sermon preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist on October 26th, 2025 – Luke 18:9-14 & Matthew 25:31-46)

On Friday, Jacob and I talked with a man who was busy loading his shopping cart with all his belongings and had clearly been sleeping on the church verandah. I wrote a letter for him to take to a housing provider in order for him to secure some safe temporary accommodation.

Not long after that another man was sitting on the pew outside the green room, devouring a punnet of strawberries from the Open Pantry. He was famished and quickly downed another punnet.

Shortly after, another young man who comes by each week for a chat and some frozen meat arrived. We chat a bit and this week he told me of the difficulty of living with continuing hallucinations that stem from Post Traumatic Syndrome Disorder associated with childhood trauma. He thanked me for chatting with him as he left with his carer.

At lunchtime I met a woman attending the NA group, she was celebrating having been clean for 6 years that very day. In the same group I then chatted to a transgender person who I hadn't seen for a while.

Then a few more people came looking for food and frozen meat.

Just a few hours in God's backyard here at Footscray.

Jesus said that when you feed, clothe, welcome, offer refreshment to the least you are doing it to him.

Here at Footscray, we don't have to look to far to find people in great need, they are right here on our doorstep, they are right here in God's backyard.

These people are desperate; their need is obvious and urgent. In conversation they are upfront and honest, they are looking for compassion and mercy, and I might add, are extremely grateful when they experience it. There is relief on their faces when they find themselves being encouraged rather than judged.

The Yes In God's Backyard (YIGBY) is a movement that began in the USA a couple of years ago. The aim was to use underutilized land owned by faith groups, often in great locations near public transport, services, shops for the vulnerable via social and affordable housing.¹ This is done by partnering with housing organisations and governments to fund the building of and manage such endeavours, the faith-based communities contribute the land. The Australian government currently is looking favourably at such collaborations, as it grants funds for the capital needed to build. The government has already given BaptistCare NSW significant funding to build social housing.²

¹ Information taken from article by 'thereforgroup'

² Article 'Yes, in God's backyard' by David Crowe in The Age, Dec 3, 2024.

Yes in God's Backyard (YIGBY)

(Sermon preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist on October 26th, 2025 – Luke 18:9-14 & Matthew 25:31-46)

Our bible readings today seem to me, to have two kinds of people. One kind who are all puffed up and full of their own importance and the other those who are humble and go about serving God quietly.

In our first reading, we have a Pharisee praying, contrasted with, a tax collector praying. The Pharisee seems to be fairly sure of themselves and looks to be talking **at** God, reminding God of all his great attributes and comparing himself to another. The tax collector, on the other hand, seems to know himself and his faults quite well, unable to look up yet seeking God's mercy and forgiveness. Jesus is quite clear about which of these individuals is justified, and it is not the 'religious' one, it is the one who is humble and honest in his prayer.

Similarly, in our reading from Matthew we find two kinds of people. One group who are humble as they go about living out their faith, this group simply got on with practicing acts of mercy and compassion following in the footsteps of Jesus. Without great fanfare they fed those who were hungry, they visited those who were imprisoned, they clothed those who were naked and welcomed the strangers in their midst. It was so natural to their being that they almost forgot when they were doing it. They humbly served their God and in so doing were serving Christ. The other group it seems, went about their lives with little concern for others, they clearly did not notice the vulnerable in their midst and they did not offer acts of mercy and compassion to them. In essence they failed to love their neighbour and therefore their God. Again, Jesus is clear about who is justified, those who humbly serve their fellow humans are praised and told that in their actions, they are in reality, serving Christ. And like the Pharisee in our first reading, the other group who did not serve their fellow humans by sharing their resources and showing compassion are clearly condemned by Jesus.

Which kind of person shall we be?

If I think about some of the greats in our Christian faith, people like St. Francis and Mother Teresa – who lived out Matthew 25 in their communities as they fed, clothed, visited, welcomed 'the least of these', it seems to me that they used all their resources to put Matthew 25 into practice, they used their land, their food, their prayer. They understood the importance of using 'God's backyard' to minister to those in great need. We have the opportunity to do the same.

God is encountered in the faces of the least – the poor, the ragged, the ill, the prisoner, the stranger. Life in God's kingdom is found when the hungry are fed, the ill cared for, the stranger welcomed, the naked clothed and by extension the homeless housed and the vulnerable looked after.

The kingdom of God is not defined by arrogance and self-righteousness, it is defined by humble, compassionate service to neighbour and God.

The challenge before us is to say Yes to God and God's service. We have an opportunity to use what we have, our resources to minister to the vulnerable in our midst, to send a message out into the world that says Yes, we follow a God who cares for the least of the least, we follow a God who has blessed us with assets that we can and should use for the vulnerable in our midst.

Yes in God's Backyard (YIGBY)

(Sermon preached by Cheryl Williams at Footscray Baptist on October 26th, 2025 – Luke 18:9-14 & Matthew 25:31-46)

I am reminded of what Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, 'the church must share in the secular problems of ordinary human life, not dominating but helping and serving.'³ Elsewhere he says 'the church is her true self only when she exists for humanity.'⁴

Let us heed the words of Dietrich who was executed because he dared to stand up against the powers of his day and follow the example of the tax collector and the sheep and countless ancestors in our faith and share what we have in humble service of both God and neighbour.

Let us take the risk to be 'Yes' people, people who can say 'Yes, in God's backyard'.
Amen.

³ Quote from Dietrich Bonhoeffer in 'Letters Papers from Prison'.

⁴ *ibid*