



Easter to Pentecost Reflections 2020

Parramatta Mission

Uniting Church in Australia

The Season of Easter commences on Easter Day and extends 50 days until Pentecost. On the fortieth day is Ascension. Every Sunday of the year is celebrated as Easter, as the resurrection of Jesus. This year the Pastoral Team will be providing a daily Bible reading, reflection and prayer to assist our members in their daily devotions. In the Acts of the Apostles, 2:41, Luke writes that the Christians “continued steadfastly to the apostle’s teaching and in community, in the breaking of the bread, and in the prayers.” Faith is a gift of God which is received in obedience. That obedience is expressed in nurturing the gift of faith, in living the Christian life with the whole of our life for the whole of our life. These reflections are our humble contribution to encouraging and nurturing our church in the faith.

Blessings, The Pastoral Team

Reflections will be written by:

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Acts 2:37- 41, Monday 27th April, 2020

³⁷ Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers,³⁸ what should we do?” ³⁸ Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” ⁴⁰ And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” ⁴¹ So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

Reflection

We live in a time where talk of the present being a ‘corrupt generation’ does not travel very well. It sounds very harsh. Yes, there are individuals here and there whom we might define as corrupt – but a whole generation! The Greek-speaking world into which the gospel was proclaimed had a different worldview from ours. They would think in terms of perfection and corruption in the sense of a creation that was still subject to death, disease, incompleteness, injustice. The current environment we inhabit is one where the common discourse is of “we’re all in this together” and “when we get to the other side” of the pandemic and back to ‘normalcy’ or ‘normality’. Maybe we should think of the present lockdown and its causes as a way of exposing our fragility, our vulnerability, our limits as a species. We are subject to corruption - we are mortal. We cannot create the perfect state, the perfect church, the perfect family. Into such a world comes the call to ‘repent’ and be ‘baptized’. Sometimes there is a hidden wisdom coming to terms with lifestyles and habits that have allowed our society and creation itself to be ‘corrupted’ and stand in need of repair. Maybe such a time is now. Maybe it is a time (coming so soon after Easter) to revisit our baptismal vows, our dying and rising to new life with Christ. How might faith in Christ Jesus play itself out not just now, but when we return to a variation of what we used to think was normal?

Prayer: *In a time of social distancing, in a time of lockdown and restrictions, enable us, O God, to recognize those things which have been harmful in the past and seek new life in Christ.*

Clive Pearson

Psalm 23 - Tuesday 28th April 2020

The Divine Shepherd

A Psalm of David.

1

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

2

He makes me lie down in green pastures;
he leads me beside still waters;[a]

3

he restores my soul.[b]

He leads me in right paths[c]
for his name's sake.

4

Even though I walk through the darkest valley,[d]

I fear no evil;
for you are with me;
your rod and your staff—
they comfort me.

5

You prepare a table before me
in the presence of my enemies;
you anoint my head with oil;
my cup overflows.

6

Surely[e] goodness and mercy[f] shall follow me
all the days of my life,
and I shall dwell in the house of the Lord
my whole life long.[g]

Reflection:

Psalm 23 is so well known that it can almost become meaningless. It is challenging and valuable to spend time slowly meditating on each verse, and thinking of it in very personal terms for this specific time and place. Imagine, a passage written thousands of years ago that speaks to each person in the midst of a global pandemic. God's loving kindness, provision and protection, guidance and intimate, personal presence with each of us, in every circumstance.

Prayer: *Loving Father, your care for me is beyond my ability to understand and yet even - and especially! in the dark places, you are with me. Thank you! Thank you! Thank you!*

Sarah Bishop

1 Peter 2:19-25 - Wednesday 29th April 2020

¹⁹ For it is a credit to you if, being aware of God, you endure pain while suffering unjustly. ²⁰ If you endure when you are beaten for doing wrong, what credit is that? But if you endure when you do right and suffer for it, you have God's approval. ²¹ For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps.

²² "He committed no sin,

and no deceit was found in his mouth."

²³ When he was abused, he did not return abuse; when he suffered, he did not threaten; but he entrusted himself to the one who judges justly.

²⁴ He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

²⁵ For you were going astray like sheep, but now you have returned to the shepherd and guardian of your souls.

Reflection

First, the context, which the lectionary setters have spared us from, and that is verse 18. "*Slaves, accept the authority of your masters with all deference, not only those who are kind and gentle but also those who are harsh.*"

For most 21st Century audience the words are repulsive even nauseatic. Full stop, Peter, we don't want to hear anymore, for passages like this have given biblical justification for slavery and inhuman suffering of the slaves. Some believed their suffering was redemptive, as in today's world some think that the endurance of the victims of domestic violence bring them closer to God. NO, FULL STOP. No form of abuse/violence is acceptable.

Then what do we do with a passage like this? Expunge, is the easy answer. I'm not taking that road. I think it's important to remember that many of Peter's Christian audience were slaves, who faced mistreatment by their masters. While Peter makes cultural accommodation of slavery, he highlights the unjust suffering of the slaves. He does not call unjust suffering good, but the intention to endure suffering and pain out of an awareness of fulfilling God's call to do the right thing.

The sufferings of the early Christians were no better than those slaves Peter mentions in this passage. Neither are they for Christians of any age in any place who follow the risky way of Christ. Ask Martin Luther King or Nelson Mandela. There are times in our lives when we will suffer, unjustly, like standing up to a co-worker who cuts offensive jokes, seeking social justice for the marginalised, exposing modern day slavery, preaching uncomfortable word to a comfortable congregation, marching arm and arm in protest down a city street. These can lead to suffering. But these have God's approval. "Jesus", says Peter, "suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps." Jesus endured suffering because he knew that he was building God's kingdom of love, compassion, justice and peace. Shall we follow him?

Manas Ghosh

Acts 2:42-47, Thursday 30th April, 2020

⁴² They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers.⁴³ Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles.⁴⁴ All who believed were together and had all things in common;⁴⁵ they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds^[a] to all, as any had need.⁴⁶ Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home^[b] and ate their food with glad and generous hearts,⁴⁷ praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.

Reflections

Not long before they had been a fearful huddle locked away in rooms: they were seeking to make sense of what had befallen their teacher, Jesus of Nazareth. What were they then to make of the cross - and then the empty tomb and appearances? Following the command to return to Galilee we now see them back in Jerusalem and spending so much time in the very place where Jesus had caused such a stir with his teaching. It was the chief priest, after all, who had accused Jesus of blasphemy and now the disciples turned apostles were praising God and performing wonders in what would have been for them a 'hot spot'. That time in the temple is matched by what is happening in the home. They are breaking bread at home. There were no church buildings yet: they were not even being called Christians. These folk who were among the first to be baptised in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, are set apart by their common life together, their sharing of life's goods with one another, their worship and what happens in their homes. Might this time of lockdown, social distancing and restrictions be an opportunity for us to contemplate a new future for our lives together 'in Christ'? Are there things which can happen in our homes which have not happened before? Are there ways in which we 'consume' and use our 'possessions' which can be done differently?

Prayer: *Transform us, risen Christ, so that we may become communities worthy of your name. Amen*

Clive Pearson

Acts 4:1-12, Friday 1st May, 2020

Peter and John before the Council

4 While Peter and John^[a] were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them, **2** much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. **3** So they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. **4** But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand. **5** The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, **6** with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John,^[b] and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. **7** When they had made the prisoners^[c] stand in their midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” **8** Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, **9** if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, **10** let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,^[d] whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. **11** This Jesus^[e] is ‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.’^[f]^[12] There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

Reflection

Peter and John had healed a blind beggar and spoken to the people who gathered about Jesus. The crowds had witnessed the power of God at work and many believed in it and in Jesus. Now we see a conflict of power: the high priest and those around him are the people who held responsibility in Jesus' death. They thought they had put an end to it all, but now they are faced with Peter and John, the ones who proclaimed resurrection. They are all Jews. They all believed in God, but the powerful cannot accept that God could still be working through the man they had crucified, the rejected cornerstone. These two men, surrounded by their religious leaders, are the eloquent, Spirit-filled ones. Their witness speaks of life and salvation.

Prayers: May we, each day, rediscover our faith and trust in the living power of God that surrounds us and offers us renewal, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen

Mary Pearson

Acts 4:13-22, Saturday 2nd May 2020

13 Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and realized that they were uneducated and ordinary men, they were amazed and recognized them as companions of Jesus. 14 When they saw the man who had been cured standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. 15 So they ordered them to leave the council while they discussed the matter with one another. 16 They said, "What will we do with them? For it is obvious to all who live in Jerusalem that a notable sign has been done through them; we cannot deny it. 17 But to keep it from spreading further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name." 18 So they called them and ordered them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. 19 But Peter and John answered them, "Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; 20 for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard." 21 After threatening them again, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people, for all of them praised God for what had happened. 22 For the man on whom this sign of healing had been performed was more than forty years old. (Translation NRSV)

Reflection

It is self-evident, 'captain obvious,' to say that the disciples of Jesus were convinced of the good news. However, Luke makes the point these were ordinary people. Not sure about uneducated, after all they had spent three years with Jesus. They would also have been schooled in the Torah (the first five books of the Bible) as part of their childhood education which required knowing Torah by heart. However, they were not scholars like the Apostle Paul. They came from a humble background, but the message of Jesus had hold of them, the Holy Spirit overwhelmed them, and they could not but tell others. They lived it out. The message became a contagion and no physical distance, let alone social distance, was going to stop it from spreading. The biggest threats to Christianity arrived much later in individualism and apathy. It is something for self-examination and attention that sometimes it seems we are more energetic in speaking about a recent purchase or holiday than about the life or death issue of the Christian faith.

Prayer: *Holy God, create in us such obedience to your Holy Spirit that we cannot contain your good news in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Keith Hamilton

John 10:1-10 - Sunday 3rd May 2020

“Very truly, I tell you, anyone who does not enter the sheepfold by the gate but climbs in by another way is a thief and a bandit.² The one who enters by the gate is the shepherd of the sheep.³ The gatekeeper opens the gate for him, and the sheep hear his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out.⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes ahead of them, and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.⁵ They will not follow a stranger, but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers.”⁶ Jesus used this figure of speech with them, but they did not understand what he was saying to them.⁷ So again Jesus said to them, “Very truly, I tell you, I am the gate for the sheep.⁸ All who came before me are thieves and bandits; but the sheep did not listen to them.⁹ I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved, and will come in and go out and find pasture.¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly.

Reflection

There are two prominent images of Christ captured in my mind throughout the passage which is ‘the good shepherd’ and ‘door of the sheep.’ Jesus expressed himself that I am the good shepherd and the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. (v.11) Literally, he lays down his life on the cross for us for the reconciliation with God. And in verse 7 “truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.” If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. It refers to Christ is the way and the truth and the life (John 14:6). In this difficult time of finding hope for the future, we should reflect on our relationship with God, whether we as his sheep are listening to the good shepherd and following the way that Jesus taught his followers.

Prayer: *Lord our good shepherd, as we are heading toward Pentecost, enable us to listen and follow your way amid covid-19 so that we are able to see the hope through the Holy Spirit.*

In Christ name we pray Amen.

Sunil Baek