



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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Deuteronomy 31:1-8—Monday 11th May 2020

When Moses had finished speaking all^[a] these words to all Israel, ²he said to them: “I am now one hundred twenty years old. I am no longer able to get about, and the Lord has told me, ‘You shall not cross over this Jordan.’” ³The Lord your God himself will cross over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua also will cross over before you, as the Lord promised. ⁴The Lord will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them. ⁵The Lord will give them over to you and you shall deal with them in full accord with the command that I have given to you. ⁶Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.”

⁷Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: “Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will put them in possession of it. ⁸It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”

Reflections

There is something uncomfortable about this text. Once upon a time we might not have noticed. We might have noted the comparison that can be made between Moses’ last words and the beginning of Matthew 26 when it referred to Jesus having completed all his teaching. There is a strong trace of Moses all through the way Matthew talks about Jesus—but that linking cannot close our eyes to something rather disturbing in this text. It is especially disturbing in the wake of Captain Cook’s setting foot on Australian soil 250 years ago. Imagine what it must have been like if you had lived “on the other side of the Jordan”. Imagine what it might have been like for you to be “dispossessed” of your lands and your people “destroyed”. Reading from this perspective the Lord is on the side of an invading people who will take the lands of other nations. In the light of this history how should we live out our lives with reference to first peoples? What might it mean for that relationship to be informed by the way of Christ Jesus?

Prayer: *Enable us, God of time immemorial, to view the history of this land through the eyes of Christ and the prophetic call to ‘act justly, love mercy and walk humbly with you’.*

Clive Pearson

Psalm 66:8-20 - Tuesday 12th May 2020

- 8** Bless our God, O peoples,
let the sound of his praise be heard,
- 9** who has kept us among the living,
and has not let our feet slip.
- 10** For you, O God, have tested us;
you have tried us as silver is tried.
- 11** You brought us into the net;
you laid burdens on our backs;
- 12** you let people ride over our heads;
we went through fire and through water;
yet you have brought us out to a spacious place.[a]
- 13** I will come into your house with burnt offerings;
I will pay you my vows,
- 14** those that my lips uttered
and my mouth promised when I was in trouble.
- 15** I will offer to you burnt offerings of fatlings,
with the smoke of the sacrifice of rams;
I will make an offering of bulls and goats. Selah
- 16** Come and hear, all you who fear God,
and I will tell what he has done for me.
- 17** I cried aloud to him,
and he was extolled with my tongue.
- 18** If I had cherished iniquity in my heart,
the Lord would not have listened.
- 19** But truly God has listened;
he has given heed to the words of my prayer.
- 20** Blessed be God,
because he has not rejected my prayer
or removed his steadfast love from me.

(NRSV)

Reflection

The psalmist begins by recognising God in the past - my past, our past. Particularly the difficult times. How has God been present for you? Is there a difficult time that you can recall, where you can sense that God was working in you? Present in the suffering?

Present with us. God with us...journeying together into a more spacious and gracious place and time. Is this a perspective that rings true?

Was there a point, purpose or goal to the difficult time? Could you sense a movement from darkness to light?

Along the journey we have rituals and practices which give perspective. Meeting together - whether in person, or in other ways. Bringing an offering - each according to their faith and circumstance. Worshipping God with our whole lives. Being whole, true and real with God, our self and others. We encourage one another as we walk together and share the highs and lows of the journey.

Is there someone who you could speak to - via phone or email or even mail, to share with and encourage?

Give voice to it all! Share your heart with the God who is close. Hold nothing back. All is sacred and precious to our God.

All is an offering that is pleasing and gives Glory to the Lord who loves without end.

Sarah Bishop

Wednesday 13th May 2020
1 Peter 3:13-22

¹³ Now who will harm you if you are eager to do what is good? ¹⁴ But even if you do suffer for doing what is right, you are blessed. Do not fear what they fear, and do not be intimidated, ¹⁵ but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; ¹⁶ yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. ¹⁷ For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil. ¹⁸ For Christ also suffered for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, in order to bring you to God. He was put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit, ¹⁹ in which also he went and made a proclamation to the spirits in prison, ²⁰ who in former times did not obey, when God waited patiently in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water. ²¹ And baptism, which this prefigured, now saves you—not as a removal of dirt from the body, but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers made subject to him.

Reflection

Without any ambiguity it can be said that the original audience of Peter's first letter were those Christians who were persecuted. The words suffer, suffered, and suffering appear no less than 20 times in the five short chapters of 1 Peter. These first century Christians were acquainted with suffering, versed in being misunderstood and mistreated, and experienced hostile attacks and persecution from the world around them. In this passage we hear Peter's words of encouragement, hope and resurrection promise. Peter also makes it quite clear that if you suffer when doing the kind of good for the sake of Christ's righteousness and justice, then you are blessed. It may not be palatable for many but according to Peter, both suffering and blessing are the indicators that one is acting according to Christ's righteousness and justice. Although societal recognition, high praise from peers, and a comfortable future are desirable, Peter is adamant, and I agree with him, they are not the indicators of a Christian life.

"Do not fear their fear and do not be intimidated, but in your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord." It is as much a benediction as it is a command. The early Christians, and we like them, need not be afraid. This word of encouragement reminded the early Christians that their beliefs, their imaginations, their visions for good, and all their actions did not need to be shaped by fear but rather by Christ.

Manas Ghosh

Acts 17:16-21 - Thursday 14th May 2020

¹⁶ While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was deeply distressed to see that the city was full of idols. ¹⁷ So he argued in the synagogue with the Jews and the devout persons, and also in the marketplace^[a] every day with those who happened to be there. ¹⁸ Also some Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with him. Some said, "What does this babblers want to say?" Others said, "He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign divinities." (This was because he was telling the good news about Jesus and the resurrection.) ¹⁹ So they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, "May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?" ²⁰ It sounds rather strange to us, so we would like to know what it means." ²¹ Now all the Athenians and the foreigners living there would spend their time in nothing but telling or hearing something new.

Reflection

This reading from the book of Acts is one of those key texts which lie behind our talk of being a city church and inspiring the Common Good. The marketplace in Athens was not just a place of buying and selling. It was also a site for the exchange of ideas. The Greeks were known of course for their capacity for philosophy; as part of the education of the young (only males, I am afraid) they were trained to make speeches and debate. To be an Epicurean or a Stoic meant that you belonged to a particular school of philosophy. You had been trained to argue! Into this mix comes Paul whom we know as 'the apostle' but, to them, he was a 'babbler'. In our current time we may have to come to terms with realization that many people are sceptical about the truth and moral merits of the Christian faith: the story of Jesus death and resurrection are 'strange'. Cleopas and the other disciple on the road to Emmaus knew it seemed like 'an idle tale'. And, unfortunately, we have come to know that the church has not been immune from a series of scandals. One of our callings today is to learn how to speak in our local marketplace, even if and when we feel we are little better than babblers. In our city centre—and, for the sake of the common good—we will need to learn how to debate and exchange ideas with the contemporary equivalents of those ancient Epicureans and Stoics.

Prayer: *May the Spirit of God give us confidence and find the words to say in talking about Christ Jesus and the good of all to those with whom we share the public spaces of this city.*

Clive Pearson

Acts 17:22-31 - Friday 15th May 2020

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

²²Then Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, "Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶From one ancestor^[a] he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, they would live, ²⁷so that they would search for God^[b] and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said,

'For we too are his offspring.'

²⁹Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

Reflection

In the verse that immediately precedes this passage, Luke, the writer of Acts, comments that the Greeks and other foreigners in Athens spent all their time debating ideas and looking for new things. Paul speaks to them in a way that addresses them just where they are. In amongst all their religious symbols he points to the one thing that indicates their sense that there was something more – the altar to an unknown God. It gives him the way in to talk about the one God who is not far from them. It's never bad to realise that we don't know everything and these days we may be particularly aware of that. We don't know where our life and that of the planet is heading. Paul's words address us across the centuries as we search for new things that may divert us and make life better. We are called back to see God in whom "we live and move and have our being," in whom all things find their source and meaning.

***Prayer:** God of all time and all creation, open our eyes to see how our lives and our role within your creation, are inextricably part of your purpose of wholeness.*

Mary Pearson

Saturday 16th May 2020 - Acts 17: 32-18:4

^{17:32} When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, "We will hear you again about this." ³³ At that point Paul left them. ³⁴ But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them. 18:1 After this Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. ² There he found a Jew named Aquila, a native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, ³ and, because he was of the same trade, he stayed with them, and they worked together—by trade they were tentmakers. ⁴ Every sabbath he would argue in the synagogue and would try to convince Jews and Greeks.

Reflection

Christianity, for Luke, the writer of the Acts of the Apostles, was of the highest importance. Not Christianity as a kind of philosophy, ethical framework or comfort. It was more important. It was repentance and forgiveness of sins through Jesus Christ. It was a new relationship with God. Here Luke is reconstructing Paul's mission to Athens, preaching to people with many gods and none. Here we see the response to that preaching. The news of the resurrection of Jesus is received variously as gladly with some believing, rejected loudly, or courteously deferred. Note Luke portrays Paul's departure not as pitiful, or defeated, but as 'happily emerging from a difficult situation' in which the audience has largely failed. This is a different form of communication in which the message is presented, and it is the *hearers* responsibility to hear the good news and respond accordingly. I wonder what that means for our bearing witness to our faith with others? Dionysius the Areopagite who did become a believer is recorded in church history as later becoming the bishop of Athens. Another writing suggests he later became a martyr in Paris. Then Paul is off to Corinth. Paul started the church in Corinth, which later gave rise to his Epistle – a sermon like letter. Paul is portrayed as initially working in tentmaking yet still engaged in mission work, until money was available to become a fulltime preacher. Here we are introduced to Aquila and Priscilla. They become Christians and had an extensive ministry in places such as Ephesus, Syria, Asia, Asia Minor, the Adriatic, Corinth, and Rome. They are mentioned in Paul's Epistle to the church in Corinth, the Epistle to the church in Rome, and in the letter to 1 Timothy. We just never know the effect of our witness on others. Some will scoff, some will courteously defer, and others will willingly respond. Just as well Paul did not give up when he met setbacks. Neither should we.

Keith Hamilton

Prayer: *O God, fill us with such love for you and compassion for people that we never give up witnessing to the good news of Jesus. Amen.*

Sunday 17th May 2020 - John 14: 15-21

¹⁵"If you love me, you will keep my commandments. ¹⁶And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Advocate (Comforter), to be with you forever. ¹⁷This is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, because he abides with you, and he will be in you.

¹⁸"I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. ¹⁹In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live.

²⁰On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you. ²¹They who have my commandments and keep them are those who love me; and those who love me will be loved by my Father, and I will love them and reveal myself to them."

Reflections

Five times in this short passage the word 'love' is used. In this passage it is the Greek word *agape* (ἀγάπη). There are 7 Greek words for love (*Agape*- empathic/universal/*Eros*-romantic; *Ludos*-playful; *Philia*-friendship; *Philautia*-self-love; *Pragma*- companionate; *Storge*-unconditional/familial). Some of us are familiar with the word 'agape'. *Agape* is in essence - love in action or universal love. It is not just about the feelings but is about how people live out their love. It is considered the highest form of love and it is an important word for us as Christians as it linked to the kind of love that Jesus showed which was love in service of others.

Three times the word 'know' is used. In Greek, it is the word *gnosis* (γνῶσις). Now interestingly this is not about intellectual knowledge but more a sense of personal knowledge or awareness. So, in this passage Jesus is reminding his disciples to **love** - for their love to be in action in the world - and to love him and through him, love God. He is reminding them that they **know** him - and this knowledge is an awareness that is something deeper than what we can explain. Most importantly Jesus is sending a comforter. Here the word in Greek is a *paraclete* - which can be understood as the one who comes alongside (Advocate) or the one who consoles (Comforter). At times I think we need both - one who will stand up for us and lead us and one who brings us comfort in times of distress. This is a way of saying "Pentecost is coming!"

Christine Bayliss Kelly

