

Easter 2 – 11-04-21 - Bishop Cam Venables

Readings: Acts 4:32-37; Psalm 133; 1 John 1:1-2:1; **John 20:19-31**

The Department of Home Affairs has on its website an Australian Values statement which has seven dot points which people on Permanent and Temporary Visas have to give assent to. The most poetic value is a ‘fair go’ for all - and in defining ‘fair go’ - mutual respect, tolerance, compassion for those in need, and equality of opportunity are stated..

I love the idealism of ‘fair go’ and as an aspiration I think it’s important for it to remain as we systematically work together to make it real. However, it’s not hard to recognise that as a society we fall short of this ideal. I was reminded of this last week when my wife had significant elective surgery. We are fortunate to have private health cover so we were able to arrange for the surgery to happen just a few months from diagnosis. If Kate had needed to have the same surgery in the public system she would apparently have had to wait upwards of three years! Three years of non-life-threatening discomfort and pain... rather than two months!

So, in health care at least it would seem that some people have a fairer go than others. It does not take too much research to recognise similar stories in education, employment, and housing. It seems that some people have a ‘fairer go’ than others. The criteria of who gets that fairer go seems to include, but is not limited to: income, gender, ethnicity, level of education, and where a person lives... I suggest then that ‘fair go’ is an aspirational value that needs to guide much work in future years.

This week’s reading from Acts also has aspirational values expressed for it says, “*Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the Apostles feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.*”

This sounds like ‘fair go’ in a First Century setting, but was this really what life was like for the early church? Did everyone get along; everyone share their money; and no one had need? It sounds like a form of Communism long before Marx and Engels wrote their Manifesto in 1848! The letters of Paul were written before the Book of Acts and they suggest a more complex and believable reality. For example, the wealthy and gifted church in Corinth was a conflicted community which struggled with egos and spiritual pride. They were clearly not of ‘one heart and soul’!

But there are values articulated in the Acts reading that can be aspirational for any community of Christian faith, both congregation and denomination. Imagine being part of a church in which people shared what they had, and who they were; human needs were recognised, and compassionately responded to; and there was a God given unity of heart and mind.

The Gospel this week describes a group of early believers who were frightened and uncertain. Without warning Jesus appeared and he greeted them with a blessing. The Gospel writer says that he then breathed on them while saying “*Receive the Holy Spirit!*” – evoking strongly the image given to the prophet Ezekiel where the breath of God gave life to all in a valley of dry bones. However, despite this encounter and empowering, the disciples were one week later still locked away in the house. This time Thomas was with them, and he had previously not believed his companions.

For a week Thomas had said – ‘I don’t believe you! It’s not possible that Jesus is alive! It’s not logical that someone who was killed, is now up and about meeting people!’ Yet, into that lived experience of doubt and unbelief... Jesus came to Thomas.

I think it’s reassuring to read and hear this because we are often like those first disciples – afraid and uncertain about the future; not really sure if resurrection life is possible. But, in the same way that Jesus went to those first disciples through locked doors, and empowered them with the Spirit, he comes to us and he empowers us. Through whatever barriers we put in the way, he comes to us, and, as he said to those first disciples, he says to us, “*As the Father sent me, so I send you.*”

We meet with God in prayer at home, and in church, but when we leave our these places how many of us remember that we are sent by Christ to live Christ-like lives? There is a challenge for us in this: that our faith is not just something we ‘do’ in prayer, it is a way of being in the world.

For when we read about the life of Jesus two of the consistent qualities that shaped his interactions with other people were compassion, and the desire for justice. He went to the least and the lost and the lonely of his society, and he spent time with them. He reassured them that God loved them just as much as God loved anybody else... and his religious authorities struggled to accept this.

In many ways the two Christ-like qualities of compassion and justice resonate with the Australian ideals of ‘mate-ship’ and ‘fair go’. So, is it too much to suggest that Jesus was a ‘mate’ to anybody, but particularly those who had need? Is it too much to suggest that he wanted people to be given a ‘fair go’, particularly those in his society who had been written off? In this I think particularly of women, tax-collectors, sex workers, and lepers!

So, who do we know is hurting or in need – and when we can name that person or situation how might we respond in a compassionate, Christ-like way? Who do we perceive our society has written off – and when we can name ‘those’ people – how might we respond to their lived reality , inspired by the Christ who gives our lives meaning?

Jesus said to them, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you.”

Would you please join me in prayer:

Holy God, we give thanks that you meet us in the midst of our living, even when we have questions and wonder if you’re real, and... you send us to a hurting world. In your grace, empower us with your Spirit and give us the courage to follow your leading. We pray in the name of the One who has risen, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.