

Easter Two – 2017

A few years ago I conducted a wedding at a military chapel in Brisbane. I arrived in plenty of time to ensure all was ready. People trickled in and eventually the groom arrived with his entourage. As we waited for the bride, children became restless, folk needed to use the loo, ties were loosened as the chapel became unbearably hot and full of flies. I retreated to a counselling room at the back and took off my surplice, I sat down and promptly fell asleep. I was subsequently awoken from a deep sleep by the groom, 'she's here!' By the time I got dressed, smartened myself up and got into the chapel she was already at the chancel step! It wasn't the happiest of weddings I have conducted. The etiquette of lateness... quite a minefield.

I spoke to someone recently who had been a regular at St Philip's; she was rather grumpy. Oh, she said I used to attend that Church but the minister once preached about getting to church late and that was it. He didn't have the faintest idea it was like trying to get the family ready. I came home grumpy and my husband told that if church was making me grumpy I shouldn't go! I suggested to her that things were different today and she'd be most welcome. Oh I live in Far North Queensland now, so that wasn't going to happen...and I confess to a quiet prayer of gratitude!

A current member of the congregation, who shall remain nameless arrived late yesterday for the rectory gardening bee and justified it by saying that those went to work in the vineyard later were not disadvantaged! There's no answer to that!

We could describe lateness as a metaphor for how we stand as Christians; and I don't mean late for the Sunday Eucharist. I mean coming late, arriving after it has all happened, a bit like Saint 'I'll believe that when I see it' Thomas. But unlike Thomas we don't get another chance and so we are reliant on the gospel accounts. But if we read the accounts of the resurrection as simple history, although our hearts might *just* begin to burn within us, we are still very late... and history they are not, not entirely! If we read them as such and try and construct a faith solely around them we will find that we have missed the boat, and to try and get others to believe in such an event is nigh on impossible! The sense of belatedness, of arriving too late, haunts every religious tradition whose foundations lie in definitive past events. Even Jesus' closest friends, who had shared a last supper with him, felt the warmth of his presence quickly cooling into memory.

So if this faith was and is to endure it can no longer rely on a direct experience of the risen Christ and Jesus prepared us for this. I tell you the truth, he said: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. He prevented Mary Magdalene from clinging to him and although he allowed Thomas the opportunity to touch his wounds he did so offering him a gentle rebuke and to us late comers a wonderful beatitude 'Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.' A saying which was behind Peter's words to those second generation Christians who read 'Although you have not seen him, you

love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.'

John the Baptist told his followers 'I baptize you with water for repentance, but after me will come one more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire.' So Jesus breathes his life, his spirit into the disciples, a life to be handed on. As the Father has sent me so I send you. For us the direct experience may be passed, we're late, but the spirit of the risen Jesus lives on, calls on us to respond, to hand it on. But what is it exactly that we hand on? Well Jesus after this giving of the spirit says that we are to exercise a ministry of reconciliation. Our faith, the faith we are called to hand on is ultimately one centered on reconciliation. If others are to come to resurrection faith it will be through seeing lives committed to reconciliation in all its forms. Peace be with you, Shalom! Peace, harmony, wholeness, completeness, prosperity, welfare and tranquility As the Father has sent me so I send you.

In days gone by the rites of insufflation and exsufflation were performed in the baptismal rite. Insufflation was the blowing on the waters of baptism by the celebrant to infuse them with the Holy Spirit. Exsufflation was the blowing on the candidate to rid them of the devil! It's not very St Philip's I don't think! But it does provide the link between baptism and the act of Jesus breathing on his disciples, infusing them with his spirit, assuring them of his presence. The Easter season is a baptismal season a time to reaffirm our resurrection faith. We, God's people in this place, are called to recommit ourselves to a ministry of reconciliation.

Did those first disciples understand what it was that they were called to? I doubt it very much. Do we? I doubt it. But for us newly arrived, us latecomers the resurrection's greatest challenge is not that we are being asked to *understand* something difficult; it is that I am being asked to *do* something difficult.

May all of us this Easter know God's Shalom and live lives steeped in resurrection faith, bringing reconciliation to our broken world. Amen.