

Can we walk with the refugee?

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor
Revd Linda Anchell
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Jeremiah 1:4-10; Psalm 71:1-6; Hebrews 12:18-29; Luke 13:10-17

We live in an uncertain, shaky world.

The earth; the rocks beneath our feet float on liquid magma and crack and buckle.
Sometimes the magma spews out.

It makes wonderful television viewing when Mt Etna explodes. But when Mt St Helen's blew away, suddenly for the community around anything in life which is firm and solid was brought into question.

The earth can so easily be plucked up and destroyed.

Life is a precious gift. And it can so easily, so quickly, be gone
we can so easily, so quickly tumble into grief and despair, or pain and trouble.
so easily plucked up and pulled down.

Today is Refugee Sunday and we see the world change for people again and again.

We order our lives with our ballot boxes and our armies... with treaties and alliances. We buy friendship.

We order our lives and hope to gain favour.

The Jews were a people who were marked out by their ideas of purity, especially by the Sabbath. The woman has been shamed for 18 years by her infirmity and her gender. Jesus calls her, simply "woman". He even compares her to donkeys. But she is healed and rejoices with the community.

And the synagogue ruler feels the earth shift under his feet. It is the sabbath!

The day that marks them out.

Healing is a work that can wait.

(The woman has waited 18 years after all!)

The ruler harangues the crowd.

"Come and be healed on a week day!"

It is a common rabbinical argument. They know the answers. Jesus has a different one.

"Hypocrites! You untie an ox or a donkey and lead it to water on a sabbath.

"Ought not this daughter of Abraham be untied, be set free, on a sabbath?"

And the shame has passed, has moved from the woman; bound in pain for 18 years; to the opponents of Jesus. Bound (no doubt for life) to the careful laws of their religion.

This is a god that will not be kept safe by our religious laws.

A god who will not be bound by our creeds or our conventions.

Jeremiah meets a god who is

PASSIONATE

DANGEROUS and

FREE.

if our lives and actions and words are to proclaim such a god, we must respond by being

PASSIONATE

DANGEROUS and

IMAGINATIVE.

How many excuses do we have?

We cannot say:
“I am only a child”,
god will still touch us.
or, “I am only a woman”,
god will still talk to us.
or, “I am tied up by my illness”,
god will still free us.

Have you seen the leaders of our country lately; talking about unions or refugees?
They are afraid. They have huge responsibilities and are fearful for this country.
There is a fear that Australia has had for at least one hundred years. A fear of being overrun,
swamped, by the “other”

Is it an excuse to say “I have responsibilities?”
for my children,
for my family,
for my country....?
“I am afraid; and I must protect them.”

The gospel a couple of weeks ago had the sentence:
“Fear not little flock; for it is your father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” It is a
kingdom that may turn your world upside down.

Hebrews compares the terrifying experience that the Israelites had at Mt Sinai, with Mt Zion.
One, a mountain that can be, and is, shaken; terrifying and unshakable.... One a covenant
that can be, and is, broken.

The other:
the heavenly Jerusalem: Mt. Zion.
A kingdom that cannot be shaken.
All that can be shaken has been.
This is the unshakable.
Here we come to the god who is a consuming fire.
But this is a kingdom that will turn our world upside down.

As Don Cupitt has said:
“rather than living frightened and cautious lives,
we should burn out extravagantly,
giving warmth and joy to others.”

This is Refugee Sunday.
God does not ask us to pray, to worship... we do that for ourselves.
What is required of us is justice and mercy.
walking humbly with god....
can we walk with the refugee? Can we dredge up our family memories of the times when we
were refugees? Be it in recent generations, or historically, there were times. Remember.

There are crises throughout the world. We have our part to play, even if it is the water project
in Burma. But in Australia the way that we incarcerate asylum seekers diminishes us. Read
the arguments, and be involved.

“rather than living frightened and cautious lives,
we should burn out extravagantly,
giving warmth and joy to others.”