

First Sunday in Lent 2019

Deuteronomy 26:1-11, Psalm 91, Romans 10:4-13, Luke 4:1-15

Human communities from time immemorial have been formed by narratives; stories through which we find meaning. It is perhaps significant that our struggles to maintain community correlate with the breakdown of an understanding of a narrative which we, broadly speaking, share. Looking back over this past week through the lens of our Lenten studies it seemed that trust was something that lay at the heart of this issue. It is said that we live in a world which is increasingly suffering from a 'trust deficit' and I wonder if this is caused by the lack of narrative, of a story in which we can all find a place, a role, a story in which we can all find meaning.

The 2018 Edelman Trust Barometer, shows that trust in each of Australia's four key institutions — government, the corporate sector, the media and not-for-profits, including the churches — has fallen and continues to fall at an alarming rate, there is nothing to suggest that this will change. It should give us all cause for concern because as our trust in institutions declines, so too does our commitment to them and therefore to each other. Our relationship with our institutions has become detached. The market economy for instance can really only function when there is trust, the markets call it credit. The world functions because of credit in its broadest sense. Credit comes from Credo and Credo which we affirm every Sunday is all about belief, allegiance and ultimately trust.

I hope that many of you are engaging in the wonderful studies that Dr Colin Dundon has written for us. Those of us who attended the study groups on Thursday will know that we were given a vision of two cities it was a vision described by GK Chesterton in his biography of St Francis of Assisi:

He who has seen the whole world hanging on a hair of the mercy of God has seen the truth; we might almost say the cold truth. He who has seen the vision of his city upside-down has seen it the right way up.

Chesterton believed that St Francis had not undergone a conversion in the form of some radical change or rejection of his former life. St Francis loved his city and its people, its environment and institutions, what he underwent was an inversion. The city was the same but Francis saw it all now upside down, no longer firmly grounded, solid, immovable, self-sufficient, but hanging, subject to God's mercy and providence. Francis wasn't the first, if you look at the Acts of the Apostles a complaint went up from those wanting the status quo: *'These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also,* (Acts 17:6). It is a vision of our world that we can only grasp if we trust.

When we look at the readings offered to us today we can see that trust at work in its broadest sense and it is an important part of understanding our Lenten journey together and the disciplines of Lent.

The Hebrew people preparing to enter the land they have inherited consider the narrative that undergirds their community. The narrative takes the form of a creed, it begins 'A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien.....' The Hebrew people understood their lives through their narrative, and they trusted the God of that narrative. They understood that the land they were about to enter, that had been promised, was an inheritance. The city that is part of the 'world' is concerned with ownership. The great Aussie dream! The upside down city is concerned with stewardship and the Hebrew people respond with their own Harvest Festival. The first fruits of land are presented to God as acknowledgment of their trust in his goodness.

The passage from Paul's letter to the Roman is tricky, but we can continue this fascinating vision. The Hebrew city takes the form of a Temple and admittance to the Temple is dependent of many things such as your ethnicity, and your adherence to the law, the Torah. St Paul turns this upside down; there is no distinction between Jews and Greek (in other words between Jews and 'others') but what makes a difference is whether or not you trust. Paul picks up from the writer of Deuteronomy, he says that if you have a narrative and if you acknowledge that narrative you will see what God has already done, in Paul's case – in the Christ event in death and resurrection; this is the ground of Paul's trust.

Jesus of course is the pinnacle of this theme. In the person of Jesus everything is upended! The devil of course is pretty keen to get Jesus back on track, the right way up! He is determined that Jesus will be self-sufficient, he is determined that Jesus will engage in the power and authority of market economics or politics or religious superstition. He knows the right words, he knows Jesus' narrative, he can quote from the Psalms with the best of them. But there is no salvation in these things, salvation is to be found in simple trusting. This is the story of Jesus in wilderness.

What our Lenten journey and its disciplines are about is trust. Entering into the trials of Jesus even in our own limited way involves trust. And what this does is help us to see things in a new way. It helps to see beyond the self-sufficiency that can be so much part of our thinking, it helps us to see beyond the things that we take for granted, including our religion. It helps us to understand that what we are merely stewards of the things we have and treasure. This requires of us to trust.

This Lent then let us consider the narrative that undergirds our lives. The story of the Hebrew people and their liberation, the bestowal of the law and the land and the obligation that comes with it and then the coming of Christ as fulfillment. That narrative lives on in us and our Lenten journey is set before us that we may trust in it and in turn be found trustworthy in living it out in our own time. Amen.