

Jesus Christ is risen!

St Philip's Anglican Church, O'Connor

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Matthew 28.1-10

One of the things I do at Easter is have a look at what the on-line media are saying about the message of Easter. There are plenty of opinions out there about religion and faith. There are plenty of opinions out there about just about everything. Some topics that get discussed on-line generate a lot of discussion and the number of posts can run into the hundreds. One thing that has struck me is that many of the comments are overwhelmingly negative, negative in both what is said and how it is said. Every one seems to want to bring everything down. Some are downright aggressive. There also seems to be deep cynicism about human beings. The aggressiveness, the cynicism, the negativity and the confrontation seem very dark.

It was Freud and I think Jung who talked about the death impulse, the impulse to darkness. They called it *Thanatos*, after the old Greek god of death. It might seem strange to speak of the Internet as a place where *Thanatos* can be found but any place where despair is invoked, there *Thanatos* lurks. The death impulse can be found anytime and anywhere—from slavery in the Sudan, to racial vilification in Australia; from oppression in Burma to domestic violence in Sydney; from the destruction of the Amazon Rainforest to the dying of the great Murray River; from the cry of the abandoned child in Manila to the despair of the homeless person in Canberra.

The story of Jesus crucifixion is for me the ultimate account of *Thanatos* at work. It is a deeply disturbing story of fear and mob violence. In the suffering and death of Jesus is represented all the darkness and sin of which our world is capable. At our Good Friday service we entered into that story and sat with it for those three long hours. It is a story that is confronting, distressing and deeply moving.

For the Gospels make it clear that Jesus was innocent of all the charges laid against him. In the beginning all those around him want something from Jesus. They desire what he can give. The disciples want Jesus approval and status in the new kingdom he proclaims. The crowds of people want healing and reassurance. The religious leaders are envious of his popularity and influence. The Roman authorities desire order, the *pax romana*.

Yet finally they all turn against him. He is betrayed, deserted, abandoned by his closest friends and disciples. He is unjustly condemned by his own people, his own blood. He is tortured and crucified by the most powerful army on earth. All the darkness, violence and sin that the mob could summon are heaped upon him. Under the weight of betrayal and violence he dies. The life that was in him was extinguished, snuffed out, finished.

But friends, the message of the Gospels is that three days later through the power of God he rose from the grave. However we understand the resurrection, and I for one believe it was the real deal—full bodily resurrection—however we understand it, something profound and world changing happened on those days and weeks after the crucifixion of Jesus.

In this high drama with earthquakes, angels, guards who have fainted from shock and terrified women, Jesus comes to the disciples with this word: "Greetings". After everything that had happened and everything they had done to him he stands there and says, "Greetings". You know, Hello, Bonjour, Hi, G'day. It is so simple it is startling. How much is in that one small

word—there is vulnerability, there is forgiveness, there is invitation and there is revelation. Perhaps more astonishing than this greeting is the fact that he actually went to them.

To illustrate what I mean let me tell you about something that happened to me when I was about 10 years old. I was not a very popular kid at school. I'm not sure why. I was pretty shy I guess and I wore glasses that made me stand out but there was nothing really obvious. Except perhaps that the most popular girl at school really didn't like me. One day she and literally the whole school bailed me up, put me on this high seat in the playground, circled me and started moving into the centre where I was and out again chanting horrible childish insults. It went on for what seemed ages. I sat there frozen in fear and deeply mortified. I can still remember the feeling in my stomach and the lump at the back of my throat as I tried desperately not to cry. Eventually it stopped and I slid away. To this day I cannot walk past my old playground without thinking of that traumatic event. The thought of going to a school reunion leaves me cold.

But my experience of insult and derision was nothing compared to what happened to Jesus. Yet he came to those who had denied and abandoned him. He came to those who had turned on him and he said, "Greetings—be not afraid." (?!!) I don't know about you, but I would probably have done one of two things. I would have gathered together that legion of angelic armies that were obviously at my command and smitten the lot of them. That would make sure they would never do that to anyone else. Or I would have taken the first camel out of Palestine and found a nice island on the Nile while I waited around for the ascension. Anything but have to be in the same place as that murderous, treacherous mob.

But Jesus did not do either of those things. He didn't quietly disappear. He didn't punish them. He came back to them. He stood before them and offered them friendship and peace. It completely blows my mind and I too want to fall flat on my face and worship him. I want to hold on to him and never let him go because friends, this is life. This peace, love and forgiveness is abundant life. In these simple words God in Jesus Christ assures us that no matter what we have done, who we are, how we have failed, he will never, ever leave us. Even though we abandon him, he will never forsake us. In those simple words he presents us with a completely new and radical way of being in the world, a way beyond blame, scapegoating and violence. It is the crucified, resurrected Jesus who points us to a whole new way of being and living.

But Jesus does not leave his Easter message at that. He follows his words of reassurance with the command to go and tell others. This for me is another miracle in the resurrection story. The fact that frightened, terrified human beings, who normally can be so enthralled and captured by the death impulse and its fear and despair, its negativity and aggression can actually get up, go and preach a completely different message—a message of hope, love and forgiveness. They tell someone, who tells someone else and somehow the message grows and takes on power and here we are 2,000 years later still telling the story. We know that the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, is the power behind this extraordinary history but given what we humans are like, I still feel awed that it even happened.

So this is what we celebrate today, this story of light, life and love in a world of fear, darkness and violence. This is what we want for Michayla and Angus being baptised today. When we baptise our children we are declaring that we want them to share in this new life, this new way of being that Jesus makes possible.

When we pour the waters of baptism over their head in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit we are stating that we want for the same unity peace and love found in the God himself. The water of baptism is a sign of the grace of God that we ask to be poured out in blessing upon them, making them one with him through Jesus Christ. They, like us, become part of Christ, part of church, whose purpose is to proclaim this radical message of life no

matter how difficult or dark. We are called to live this in thought, word and in deed. We are called to proclaim it as we open our doors and our hearts to those in need.

For we are the body of Christ, he lives in us and we live in him. When we are baptized, when we share in the bread and the wine in remembrance of his death but mostly of his life, we are called back to our true nature, beings made in the loving image of God and who now live in the resurrection. We are the new life.

Jesus Christ is risen! He is risen indeed, alleluia!!