

St Philip's O'Connor  
Second Sunday in Lent      24 Feb 2013  
**Genesis 15:1-12, 17-18**  
Psalm 27  
Philippians 3:17-4:1  
Luke 13:1-9

Linda Anchell

Colin will be playing hymn 339 after this, you might like to have it open now rather than looking for it after the sermon.

I never know what will happen in the week before I preach...  
so I can't write the introduction or finish a sermon weeks before  
hand...

and this time I needed to!

You might know that I have been signing and breaking contracts and  
agreements ---

    selling and buying a house  
saying goodbye to Burra and the country lifestyle.

then on Monday morning  
    at 3.30am

    Fred went outside.... and being of a "certain age" I was up  
too.

He called me out to see the sky!

so bright, millions of stars (could I count them? like dust they are in  
the milky way)

and then I SAW IT

    I saw THE EMU!

The Emu. In the Milky Way,  
    below the Southern Cross  
        is an Emu Head

The beak is pointing across the sky  
 behind it to the east, the body, stretching almost halfway  
 down to the horizon,  
 with a leg just falling down as if it was in full flight  
 like a floating, dancing, rock painted emu.

I had heard of this. An Aboriginal naming of the sky. I had looked  
 for it in the bright skies of the Kimberley but my eyes just did not,  
 would not see it.

and this week, just before I leave my valley I SAW IT  
 It leaped out at me, it was simply, there.

It is not the stars, it is the dark patches in the stars  
 a new way, another way of seeing.

A place of darkness in amongst the brilliance of the sky.

Our prayer of the day says: that Abraham was given faith to obey  
 god's call and go out into the unknown

He had done this, now he hesitates, he is keenly aware that he has  
 no offspring, no natural heir, only Eliezer to inherit... he asks  
 (testing god, he asks)

"what will you give me, for I continue childless"

and the answer comes:

"Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count  
 them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your descendants be.' 6And he  
 believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness.  
 the psalm and Philippians reading illuminate Abraham's actions. I will  
 leave that to you to ponder.

Now, last week I went outside and could not count the stars, they  
 were as dust spattered across the heavens! But I saw the darkness,  
 unexpectedly. I saw the emu, unexpectedly.

This reading, in Genesis, has a darkness, an unexpected one.

Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtle-dove, and a young pigeon.<sup>10</sup> He brought him all these and cut them in two, laying each half over against the other; but he did not cut the birds in two.<sup>11</sup> And when birds of prey came down on the carcasses, Abram drove them away.

<sup>12</sup> As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram, and a deep and terrifying darkness descended upon him.

<sup>17</sup> When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire-pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.<sup>18</sup> On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram,

I go to my favourite Jewish commentator and get nothing. well, not "nothing", always Avivah Zornberg deepens my understanding of god and life; but here, no, not on the covenant ceremony. Elie Wiesel perhaps gives more, because he is writing about the suffering of god. That is what this passage might be about.

I won't delve too deeply today, because we have an AGM to consider. Agreements to make and perhaps sign. Yesterday many of us (I hope) were with Andrea and the other ordinands as *they* went through a solemn ceremony. Fred and I are moving out of our Burra home and into a place here in town. The business! the transactions! the contracts we have signed! (and broken); or changed... the paperwork! Thank God for Solicitors! Thank God for Friends!

We carve up blocks of land and think we own them, and they own us....

Abraham had hesitated, and he tested god. So the command comes to prepare to make an agreement, a contract, a covenant. It is not known if this gory Ancient Near Eastern Covenant was ever enforced, if a builder whose building fell down or if a debtor who did not repay a debt were ever dismembered; But it is a powerful statement of an intent to do as is promised!

I go to my favourite Jewish commentators because they know about god; they know a god who follows them into exile, who knows their suffering, who suffers with them. I love to use the old Jewish traditions because they are so human and because they have been arguing with god for many thousands of years and that relationship shows and deepens our understanding of the stories of the book.

We have another story; and a darkness.

Lent is a procession through that story. six weeks we have to prepare ourselves. Six weeks we have, to focus.

Are we preparing for Easter? practising the rituals, preparing the candles, thinking about food for dinners and breakfasts...

where *is* Lent leading us? to what... to where... ?

When the sun had gone down and it was dark, a smoking fire-pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces. 18On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram,

Where is Lent leading? What is the culmination of this time of prayer and contemplation and cleansing?

When does Lent finish?

Is it Good Friday? well, not really, our Lenten disciplines do not finish on the Friday, (despite hot cross buns) there is the Saturday to get through. that is another very strange, troubling space. a place of deep and terrifying darkness.

not "another story"; just "no story"....

but Friday

the focus on Good Friday is not on us, not on ourselves. not on what we might be able to do...

it is again a strange and bewildering place, a strange and bewildering story.

Can we, dare we, connect it to this story in Genesis? Is this Abrahamic Covenant, this agreement between god and Abraham pointing us towards the cross?

[towards a broken body; blood which is shed...]

Is this why the Jewish commentators are silent?

Notice the dark spaces in this story, not just the dismembered animals, but the inactive Abraham, the action of only one of the participants. Only one, and it was *not* Abraham.

pardon me, but I can only do this in a poem....

The Abrahamic Covenant  
Genesis 15:17

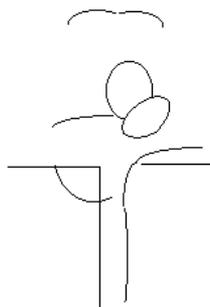
The animals were split in two  
lying in two rows  
half a heifer  
half a goat  
then the dove  
and pigeon  
whole  
one either side  
blood on the ground  
death smelling in the air  
hot  
thick  
dark  
oppressive  
remorseless  
soporific  
a terrifying darkness  
and Abraham succumbed  
swooned  
fell on the ground

One  
one who is  
went through  
and there was smoke  
and there was flame  
thick oil smoke  
rising from the basin  
from the fire

that glowed in the pot  
and it moved  
it floated  
it went through the animals  
past the carcasses  
over the blood  
and the covenant was written in that blood  
thick and dark and foul  
“If I renege  
If I default  
If I do not honour this covenant  
May it be so to me  
May I be also as these animals  
these carcasses  
these hacked bodies.”

**And it was so.**

**And it was so.**



## Hymn 339

O sacred head sore wounded,  
with grief and shame weighed down;  
O kingly head surrounded  
with thorns your only crown;  
death's shadows rise before you,  
the glow of life decays;  
yet hosts of heaven adore you  
and tremble as they gaze.

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The poem I used at the end of the sermon is at:  
[http://members.tip.net.au/~lindafrd/old\\_site/page29.html](http://members.tip.net.au/~lindafrd/old_site/page29.html)  
(this is with a dramatic background)

[http://members.tip.net.au/~lindafrd/old\\_site/page24.html](http://members.tip.net.au/~lindafrd/old_site/page24.html)

mentioned in another sermon  
[http://members.tip.net.au/~lindafrd/old\\_site/Sermon\\_LentIV.htm](http://members.tip.net.au/~lindafrd/old_site/Sermon_LentIV.htm)

Theology behind the poem  
[http://members.tip.net.au/~lindafrd/old\\_site/page26.html](http://members.tip.net.au/~lindafrd/old_site/page26.html)