

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost -2019

This week we heard the news of the passing of Bishop Cecil Warren, a former Bishop of this Diocese and first Rector of this Parish – 1960-63. He has been spoken of as a good priest, a plain speaking man. I have been revisiting his autobiography 'A little foolishness' in it he writes of being told he was to go to O'Connor 'I was not well pleased!' Of course Ernest Burgmann was the Diocesan at the time and features in the book. He too was a man who spoke plainly.

In 1951 he was described by PM Robert Menzies as 'that meddling priest.' Burgmann had protested at the Government's plans to ban the Communist Party of Australia. I wonder if Menzies was channelling Henry II who famously described his Archbishop of Canterbury as 'that turbulent priest.' Words which resulted in Thomas a'Becket's assassination. Burgmann of course survived and perhaps wore his rebuke from the PM as a badge of honour. There is little chance of any of our current Bishops being described in such a way and perhaps that's a shame.

Last weekend's Diocesan Synod provided little impetus to get our Bishop on the front page of the Canberra Times or inside for that matter, let alone assassinated. He is probably grateful for that. But clearly we have little if any voice and that is a cause for concern. I have to confess that my contribution to the Synod did not encourage our Bishop to take any radical action. I simply told the Synod members to, and I quote, 'Get yourselves to the 'Spring Fling' next weekend, it's the place to be seen!' I'm sorry.

So let me put my motion now! In plain terms! Let's really work hard to concentrate our vast resources, financial, intellectual, medical, ethical on those most in need in our communities. The sick, the lonely, the under employed, the under paid, the elderly, the homeless those on the margins. The rest of us, well, we'll cope. We have the resources to deal with it! All those in favour say aye! Against...It wouldn't get up would it?

At the Synod there were the usual motions put to the synod which elicited the usual responses. The three issues that seem to dominate and create a deal of heat rather than light concern Asylum seekers and refugees, Climate change and the environment and the Well-being of our indigenous people. Since my time on the synod a pattern has emerged. The mover will put the motion and give an impassioned speech imploring the synod to carefully and prayerfully consider this issue. Important Biblical imperatives are cited justice, stewardship, reconciliation, but we are soon brought down to earth. The synod is told that such motions involving letters to governments will usually be ignored because of the way they are framed: too emotional, too political, too idealistic, too religious, insufficient understanding of the issues involved etc etc etc!! The motion is then watered down, voted down, or simply, as was the case, put down! One

comment was made during these debates was that our roll in all this was to speak 'truth to power.' and as I considered our readings this morning I began to see this emerging.

The issue of Moses speaking with God always raised a little smile. Much like Abraham and his bargaining before God who is about to destroy Sodom. These are texts that are difficult for us to grasp. I think we need to appreciate that running through the OT is a theme something like a court room drama. We can see it in the prophets, in Micah: "O, my people, what have I done to you; how have I exhausted you?" Why are we in this courtroom at all? It all began so well. "I brought you up from the land of Egypt, redeemed you from the house of slavery" At our Confirmation classes we have been learning about the Passover and how the prophets warned the Hebrew people to remember what God had done for them and what in turn he required from them. Eventually as we learnt, and are learning, God would come among us and in the person of Jesus speak truth to power.

This is what we see played out in the two parables this morning. The power is the religious establishment and Jesus is the truth. Jesus puts God in the role first of a shepherd, a particularly despised class of labourers within first-century Jewish culture and then, even more shockingly, in the role of one from the least powerful and most inferior class in the contemporary culture, a woman! Back to the courtroom, we can imagine the response from the prosecution: Who puts 99 sheep in jeopardy in order to take the risk that one might be found? No one who is trying to run a livestock business that's for sure! And who turns their whole house upside down, and lights a lamp, using up precious oil, in order to search for a small amount of money and then, when it is found, throws a party? It makes no sense to spend so much for such a small return. The case is dismissed, power wins again!

But this, Jesus says, speaking for the defendant, is *how God acts*. God the "foolish" shepherd, God the "ridiculous", poor woman. The Good Shepherd is unceasingly looking for us; we are constantly being offered love, even if—or perhaps especially when—we are lost. It makes no real sense, it defies reason. It wouldn't stand up in the court of law or get through Synod, such thinking would be ignored if we passed a motion on this and sent it to government, but this is *how God acts*.

Jesus would eventually find himself in a courtroom on that fateful Friday. Power had no response to his arguments. The motions that Jesus had put during his life, which was lived as a courtroom drama, were passed over, voted down and he was silenced; power knew nothing of truth, as Pilate demonstrated.

What then do you we do? The Passover of Jesus is lived out in every Eucharist. At the end of the Eucharist prayer I ask you to give assent to a motion, it is the movement of Christ from death to life and we give our assent in the great Amen. One of the Cappadocian fathers wrote 'Let your Amen be heard across the Bosphorus'...may your voice too be heard! In our Passover, in this and every Eucharist we celebrate *our* foundness, and commit ourselves to seek out those who are on the margins. We'll be told we're wasting our time, we'll be told there are better ways, we'll be told it's a poor use of resources. Whatever... I'll put the motion again... all those in favour! Amen.