**Easter Sunday 2020- The new growth our hearts desire**

The Christian story is the tale of regeneration, love and resurrection from the clutches of death, despair and decay.

In another parish some years back, I remember our newsletter editor telling me that the theme of resurrection (and we had found lots of other ways to express that idea over the months) had turned into *the only* theme for *every* edition of the newsletter.

I think that editor may be listening today, and remember our conversation. In essence I said- resurrection is the only tale we have to tell (which he was very kind supporting me on).

There is no way around it, Christianity is the Easter day story of life even after death.

In our gospel this morning after Jesus’ death, another doomy portent follows, as the earth-quakes with the descending angel. *“And suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord, descending from heaven, came and rolled back the stone and sat on it” Matthew 28.2.*

Bur the earthquake, and the proceeding death are just the start of the story because then we hear from the angel’s lips *“Do not be afraid; I know that you are looking for Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for he has been raised, as he said” Matthew 28 5-6 (bits of).*

This is not just a dusty old story that we drag out again as a curio form another era, or as a bit a historical lark, as we might with an ancient Greek tragedy. This is a contemporary message as much as an ancient one.

**Getting resurrection right**

**The unfolding devastation of 2019/ 2020**

Let’s take a mental time travel to the recent past of New Year’s eve 2020, before we knew too much about COVD-19. Remember how the country was on fire? Do you remember that other states were living a total nightmare and then places closer to home suffered great devastation too?

Do you remember waking up and smelling smoke and seeing haze day after day?

Do you remember the pictures of terrified families in caravans, on beach fronts, and in little boats as fires approached them? Do you remember the loss of firefighters’ lives ? Do you remember the terrible loss of animal life? The destruction of the land and property?

From that appalling waste and terror came what…….?

Hardness of hearts? Greed and depravity? Waste and cruelty? Well no, for the most part Australia got it right.

**Australia got it right for the most part**

We gave God thanks for firefighters, and their uniforms became synonymous with national pride. The government put more money into their work, people cooked them meals and children wrote them letters of thanks.

This parish was able to send $3,500 to the K.I. Church to assist Reverend Brad and Joh Henley, and the whole K.I Church, to meet needs in their devastated community after just ten days of seeking donations.

Celebrities and poor folks, old and young together said “we have to help” and dug deep to put their money where their mouths were to help others (often rural communities) rebuild.

**The unfolding COVID-19 devastation**

COVID 19 has brought some of the same wide scale, unimaginable devastation. And how devastating depends on where you live. Typically developing and densely populated countries will pay the heaviest price. In places where isolation is impossible due to overcrowding, ventilators are few and life is more precarious the disaster is unthinkably huge. Rich people catch planes and ride on luxury ships and this is how the virus has spread to people who could never afford to fly or cruise the seas- but suffer nevertheless.

Even in Australia, those with less stable work and housing, those who work in causal positions, those who are on the street, have all be disproportionately affected by COVID 19.

The poor are the first to feel the impacts for the rest of us, and I can tell you that demand on our community pantry has been extremely high, and notes left inside it indicate this has kept some human beings in our community eating in this tough time.

We have seen greed has raised it’s ugly head. The people who were once digging into savings to support the RFS have been digging into the medicine supplies and basic food stuffs that we all need to share. Fear has sent some people into a survival frenzy that makes very little sense and is unedifying and undignified, and also selfish to the point of being cruel. I know at least three members of the parish who are now unable to get the medicine they need, because others are hoarding it.

This COVID 19 is clearly a huge story, but the frenzy and delight some newscasters have taken into fuelling the fear of everyday folks is appalling. Rather than encouraging our safe behaviour, some outlets have delighted in victim blaming, hysteria peddling and sharing misinformation. Some stations give airtime to any crack pot who will look down the barrel of the camera and tell Australia it is time to panic.

When we think about the COVID frenzy, it might be analogous to the flames and destruction phase of the bushfires, or analogous to the baying crowds and depravity of public at the execution of Jesus the Christ and the others murdered that day. This is the appalling frothy, grotesque bit where suffering is entertainment and greed rules. This is the death, despair and decay phase.

**Good signs- green shoots**

But as a country, and as a world, we do not leave it there.

You know that after a bushfire new green growth pokes through the blackened ground.

Today there are signs already of amazing hope and resurrection in Australia.

We are paying the poor a proper living allowance through the dole. That “living allowance” was completely inadequate to live on before coronavirus (you may remember me railing against that as recently as Christ the King when we joined Brighton Uniting for the day). So that living allowance is now fairer, and helps people maintain their dignity. Poor people cannot be evicted from their houses for the next six months. There is much more in this critical social justice space, including free childcare, than we have time to chronical here.

The national discourse has stopped being about punitive punishment and humiliation of the poor, and started being about community survival. An acknowledgement that we are all in this together.

When you are out walking your dog or popping into the shop now and eyes lock with a stranger they are much more likely to smile and say hello to you.

Another positive is that greed has been called out. Politicians have called hoarders IDIOTS and worse. Greed is now on the nose!

Can you imagine if somebody told you this week they bought a Rolex and a Ferrari how well that would go down? We look at excessive consumption as grotesque in April 2020- and frankly it always has been but now we call it out and prioritise it properly. We did not call it out in 2019. In 2020 we call it out.

We care about hospital staff, researchers, and health care workers. We pray for them give thanks for them- *everyone* gives thanks for them. Did we care last Easter? Did we really care about the danger they faced and the low wages of some frontline staff?

The streets of Brighton and Adelaide are often empty now, and it is eery and sad. Jo texted me with her observation that matched my own on Holy Monday. There was a prophetic tone to our reading on the deserted city from Lamentations 1: “How lonely sits the city that once was full of people!” (Lamentations 1.1). Mostly our city sits lonely and empty not because we have been devastated by a conquering army but because the physically fit and well have joined the vulnerable by staying at home. They young and fit make that sacrifice for the good of the vulnerable. It is a gift of love.

Would we have thought that pollution would have relented and given the planet a moment to take a breath?

Would you have thought that our economy would be subordinated to such a Christian response to a health crisis this year? It is a genuine miracle.

**What we take from all this?**

So with all this early start to the amazing resurrection from the jaws of absolute devastation, the question is what does your rejuvenation look like? Everything is on the table. Literally everything!

God has been teaching us that no dream is too wild.

At Easter 2020 I invite you not to gloss-over the bad (there’s plenty to complain about), to name it and shame it as it unfolds but ALSO to begin to witness to what God is doing. Not just to dwell in the mental charred paddocks of complaint, but also in the fields of rejuvenation.

Witness to green shoots and dare with God to dream about what you want for your future.

I hope that you were in some discomfort in our society last year, because there has been some appalling cruelty and scapegoating and commonplace terror wrought both subtle and overt as part of post-modern living. Especially against the elderly, the vulnerable, the poor, refugees, homeless people.

I hope that as we move through this catastrophe and into the new dawn we take with us the green shoots- bringing new green shoots to life through God’s spirit in us.

Dream BIG everyone- we could not have imagined all that has come to pass this year.

Feel that earthquake of the angel descending from our gospel reading this morning and know that the rumble means that despite what the television tells you, God is at hand and nothing is impossible with God.

TLBWY