

Third Sunday in Lent
Year C - 24/3/2019

Isaiah 55:1-9
Psalm 63:1-9
1 Corinthians 10:1-13
Luke 13:31-35

In the name of the Trinity; Creator, Redeemer, and Life-Giver...

Many of you will know (because you are involved in a group) that the Lenten Study book we are using this year is called "Today with Jesus". It was written by Bishop Doug Stevens, who was for almost ten years the Bishop of the Diocese of Riverina. In 2012 he resigned that post and returned to parish ministry, and he is now the Incumbent of a parish in the Southern Region of the Diocese of Brisbane.

In the study group of which I am a part, we have been enjoying considering Bishop Doug's reflections. One of the most prominent themes that has emerged for us in our first two sessions is the theme of *chronos* and *Kairos*. For those who may not be aware, the Greek language contains two words which translate to the one English word related to "time". So, in the Greek language there is *chronos*, which relates to the simple passing of time - the ticking of the clock as it were - the measurable unit of seconds, minutes, and hours. But Greek also has a sense of a different sort of time - and they call it *Kairos*. *Kairos* moments, or *Kairos* experiences may occur within *chronos* time, but they are not bound by it.

Perhaps an example might help. Three weeks ago now we had as our Gospel passage the story of the Transfiguration of Jesus, on the mountain. Consider the experience of the disciples at that event. Whilst on the one hand they were bound by the chronology of time - they spent a certain amount of physical time up there on the mountain, and then came down "the next day" - what happened there far transcended the constraints of normal time. In the presence of Jesus and the long-dead Moses and Elijah, God's time met human time in a brief moment of glory - this is the *Kairos* experience.

Now while most of us will not have quite such experiences as did the disciples on top of the mountain, my sense is that many people have a knowledge of this Kairos moment, and can describe it in their own lives. Indeed at least one member of our small group described such a moment quite vividly, as did another person I was speaking with the other day.

This sense of Kairos - something that transcends our human experiences is also a key theme of today's readings. Consider the words of the reading from Isaiah which we have just heard. It is a wonderful passage of poetry which probes a number of interesting themes that also occur in the other lectionary passages for the week. First, it stresses the free character of the gifts that God offers. Second, it mentions the quality of those gifts--what the Scripture calls "rich food" (Is. 55:2); a "rich feast" (Ps. 63: 5); or the "fatted calf" (Lk. 15:30). Finally, it stresses the delight that should accompany our feast with God.

The magnificent poetry of the passage brings to life all kinds of scenes and images in our imagination, and many of them reflect the Kairos nature of God's goodness and glory. However, the background to the text reminds us of the very real problems addressed by the prophet. This chapter concludes the second part of the book of Isaiah. The people of Judah and Jerusalem have been in exile. They had been violently removed from their homeland by the Babylonians 40 years earlier. They are stuck in the chronology of this. But now, the prophet brings a word of hope of return.

This hope is a fulfilment of God's promise to the people. Earlier the prophet sought to comfort them with the message that their slavery was over (Isa 40:1-11). But people who have suffered badly do not embrace hope easily. So now he again returns to the themes of human frailty and the utter reliability of God's word with that well-known saying of "my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways".

The opening of today's passage has reminded some of the invitations of the water sellers in the town square, but what is offered far exceeds that image. The thirsty and the poor are invited to drink. Neither one's need nor one's ability to pay can stifle this gift. There is nothing that can stand in the way of God's intent to bring to pass that which God desires for God's people.

One of the points of overriding importance in our study of Luke since January has been that Jesus offers an alternative to the dominant economic order of his day. Instead of our giving to others with an expectation of receiving something in return, the disciples are supposed to give, expecting nothing in return (Lk. 6:35).

Indeed, I think that one of the reasons Jesus was so controversial in his day is that his message undermined the pillars on which the economic system and system of social relations was based. And today, Isaiah, in this passage, does the same thing. He not only urges his thirsty hearers to "come to the waters" (v. 1), but he tells them in two places (v. 1) that they will be able to purchase things without money. That is, in the new dispensation of God, where the people have joyfully returned from exile, the basic principle of economic exchange is put aside.

Far more than water is on offer - wine and milk, delightful things are for the taking and at no cost.

To have access to these in the ancient world one had to be a landowner, with vineyards and herds or flocks, or have the goods to exchange for them. Not so here. Nothing is required of the "purchaser" in this deal and nothing is demanded by the giver. What matters is listening and responding (vv. 2b-3a). That is the key to life. And listening implies hearing a word; the Word of God.

But sometimes our own seeking seems in vain; our own words falter or seem hollow. And sometimes we doubt that God will respond. In these situations, then, Isaiah also has a word for us. He instructs us (vv. 8-9) not to limit our view of God to what we can understand.

That is the temptation if we get stuck in the chronos - if we see in our situation and in our God only things that readily pass the test of our own mind. Even though we might sometimes confess the unlimited nature of God and the mysterious divine ways, we sort of "expect" God to act according to our plans. But Isaiah will have none of this. "for as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (v. 9).

And that is a message we need to hear in this Lenten season. Our thoughts so often tend to get bogged down in the chronos - in the realm of "reality." As one wise person has said: "We live so easily in the grooves of the past that they become the ruts of the present." We might even confess all the right things about God but we have lost the sense of the living God in our midst.

We are thirsty within; our souls are as famished as Jesus' body was when he had not eaten for forty days (Lk 4:2). Let not this Lenten season just be another time of repeating the same old truisms. Let our thoughts not be limited by our own understanding. God abundantly pardons (v. 7). God gives us food, even rich food, without money and without price. God give us the eternal covenant that cannot be broken.

The passage acknowledges that, yes, God's promises can be doubted and challenged, but it affirms in the strongest of terms that any such doubt or challenge will be met. The promises of abundant life will succeed.

Kairos is God's time; where time is not measured in the ticking of the clock, but rather what we might call the heart-beat of creation. Here, with each heart-beat of the cosmos, we come closer to God's plan for the salvation of all creation.

Come - if you are thirsty. If you recognize within you the need, then come to God - the God whose promises are eternal, and will not be thwarted.

The Lord be with you.