

2nd Sunday of Easter
Year C - 28/4/2019

Acts 5:27-32
Psalm 118
Revelation 1:4-8
John 20:19-31

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

My friend, Jeremy Greaves, now an Assistant Bishop in the Diocese of Brisbane, shared with me this week a story about an Easter past which really struck me, as we gather on this day - the Second Sunday in this Easter season - a day traditionally known as a “Low” Sunday. These were Jeremy’s remembrances:

“When I was at theological college in Adelaide, Easter was the high point of the college year. All parish placements were put on hold, trips away with family were not permitted and the whole college community spent Holy Week in preparation for the Great Three Days. The student in charge of the grounds (me) had a particularly busy week making sure lawns were mowed, hedges trimmed, windows washed and gravel pathways raked. It was a time to try new liturgies or breathe new life into old ones and it all reached its great crescendo on Easter Sunday.

We would gather before dark to kindle the first fire of Easter and then process to the darkened chapel which gradually filled first with candlelight and then with light from the morning sun...and then one year there were balloons and streamers let down from the ceiling with the first exclamation of “Christ is Risen! Alleluia!” It was a noisy, messy, joy-filled celebration of the resurrection that stays in my mind as one of the most moving times of worship I can remember.

But even more clearly, I can remember arriving for Morning Prayer the following day. The chapel had been cleaned and tidied to within an inch of its life - there was not a balloon to be seen, not a shred of streamer, nor sparkle of glitter...it was as if Easter had never happened.

Of course, he said, I was less discreet and less sensitive than I am now, so I said as much in my chapel sermon the following day, “It’s almost as if we can’t cope with what Easter might really mean, so we’ve packed it up and put it away until we get it out again next year.”

The sacristan who had been up late into the night cleaning, fled the chapel in tears. I was summoned to the Warden’s office (again). Of course I would choose my words differently today (hopefully) but I stand by the sentiment.”

We might well smile at Jeremy’s honesty and the tone of the story, but I suspect we should reflect more on the sentiment contained within it. Easter is a wonderful day, and we do really pull out all the stops (sometimes literally in the case of the organ) to make it a special celebration.

And yet, for all of this joy and excitement, our everyday, ordinary life goes on - we do not, unfortunately, find that the miraculous events of Easter have provided an instant fix to the troubles and concerns of our lives.

And in many respects, with all of the things we face and deal with in our lives, and those that we see around the world that continue to break our hearts, you might easily say that we are a people who are far more familiar with Good Friday, and its pain and suffering, than we are with Easter Day, and the triumph and joy contained within it.

Yes, even in this period of great celebration for the church we always live in the shadow of the cross - even in this Easter season, we cannot help but look at Christ crucified and suffering, because for many of us, that is the reality in which we live, far more so than the joyful Easter reality.

However, on a more positive note; Good Friday is not the final word. Easter always trumps Good Friday.

It is almost as if the faces of Christ, one crucified and suffering, and one risen and glorified are imprinted on each side of a piece of paper; and neither one makes sense without the other - the two events are so inextricably linked that they cannot be separated. And so, in its wisdom, the Church gives us 50 days of Easter - perhaps so that we might remember that Easter is not just one day, but rather a way of living.

Perhaps author and theologian Brian McLaren says it better: “Since it occurs once a year, Easter Sunday is sometimes mistaken for a commemorative anniversary of a past event...[but] Easter isn’t something we remember. It’s something we live and breathe.”

The former Archbishop of Canterbury Rowan Williams also suggests that the resurrection isn’t just an idea we talk about or believe. In fact, he says, it’s something we *become*. He writes that: “the believer’s life is a testimony to the risen-ness of Jesus: he or she demonstrates that Jesus is not dead by living a life in which Jesus is the never-failing source of affirmation, challenge, enrichment and enlargement - a pattern, a dance, intelligible as a pattern only when its pivot and heart become manifest. The believer shows Jesus as the centre of his or her life.”

Perhaps that’s why we get the great 50 Days of Easter - so we can practise ‘living and breathing’ it for just a little while before we pack it all away for another year. I wonder how our lives might look different and how our world and our church might look different if we lived and breathed Easter in all of our lives and so became a source of “affirmation, challenge, enrichment and enlargement” for the world.

Today’s Gospel gives us a hint, I think, of just one way that we might become this source of hope for the world. Because it is into an atmosphere of fear, of gloom and uncertainty; those overwhelming emotions; that Jesus appears today - and speaks his message to the disciples. “Peace be with you” - Jesus appears among them and speaks words of peace. Jesus speaks the words that the gathered disciples needed to hear.

In times of overwhelming grief and sadness and despair, we need to hear those same words, and to be able to bring them to other wounded people, in an attempt to heal their wounds. This is our way of being a source of hope and encouragement.

The following words were inscribed in a ghetto in Poland in World War II. "I believe in the sun when it is not shining. I believe in the stars when I cannot see them. And I believe in God when I cannot hear him." Such was the faith and belief of that individual that, even in their darkest hour, they felt enough of the promise of God to be able to write such inspiring words.

It is our mission; it is our calling to speak those same words of peace into the wounded lives of those whom we encounter in our lives - to be able to offer words of comfort and hope when all around seems dark - when it seems like Good Friday all over again.

Whatever overwhelms us this morning, God comes to us in the midst of our fear and says, "Peace be with you." Whatever doubts churn in our minds, whatever sin troubles our consciences, whatever pain and worry bind us up, whatever walls we have put up, or doors we have locked securely, God comes to us and says, "Peace be with you."

Whatever hunger and need we feel deep in our souls, God calls us to this table, feeds us well, and sends us out into the world to be justice and peace, salt and light, hope for the world. We can do it, if we keep our eyes open, our minds receptive, and our hearts soft and willing to love, for we ourselves have received the words of peace and love of God. As God sent Jesus, God sends us, this day.

Let us go out and truly live Easter in our lives...

Amen.