



# St Mary's Matters

## In Uncertain Times



## SOLITUDE

Solitude, a simple den,  
A piece of paper and a pen,  
A cup of tea, a piece of toast.  
A window and the holy ghost.  
Some calm, a table and a chair;  
The mind is free, the soul is bare,  
There's love to make and life to hold.  
The ancient tiny thread of gold  
That runs through all the joy and gloom  
Is found inside this little room.



Leung

*Submitted by the Nelsons*

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## From the Editor

We have been introduced to a new vocabulary - physical distancing, flatten the curve and familiar terms such as isolation, quarantine, uncertain times, have new meanings. We have seen and been part of a new way to live our lives. The title for this magazine 'In Uncertain Times' reflects the real sense that we have that no-one really knows how this will all end up. However there are small signs everywhere that kindness and generosity are emerging and we can hope these small signs are a portent that we might discover that selflessness can be very productive of personal contentment.

While some of us have hardly been touched there is a immense amount of suffering being experienced. Let us not forget these people, do what we can to help. We must be cautious so their suffering will not have been in vain.

At your request a number of the homilies have been included in this magazine. Sometimes a little adapted for the genre.

I hope you find this edition enjoyable and inspiring. Keep well.

# *The Covid 19 Prayer*

May we who are merely inconvenienced ....  
Remember those whose lives are at stake.

May we who have no risk factors .....  
Remember those most vulnerable.

May we who have the luxury of working from home ...  
Remember those who must choose between preserving their health or making their rent.

May we who have the flexibility to care for our children when their schools close...  
Remember those who have no options.

May we who have to cancel our trips ....  
Remember those that have no safe place to go.

May we who are losing our margin money in the tumult of the economic market...  
Remember those who have no margin at all.

May we who settle in for quarantine at home ....  
Remember those who have no home.

As fear grips our country

Let us choose love.

During this time when we cannot physically wrap our arms around each other,

Let us find ways to be the loving embrace of God to our neighbours.

Amen

*FMC Chapel Submitted M Tansky*





# A Gospel for Uncertain Times

The Emmaus Journey (Luke 24:13-35) is by far my favourite Gospel reading. During the thirteen years I spent teaching at Emmaus College, Rockhampton, I regularly reflected on this reading and became aware of the great wisdom it contains.

It is a beautifully written story, a wonderfully rich resource and I believe it captures the essence of the Gospel. I am going to reflect on what it says to us during this journey – the uncertain times we are experiencing.

While I was teaching at Emmaus College I attended a summer theological course at St John's College in Jerusalem. I became aware that the site of the village of Emmaus is highly contested. The controversy exists because early Greek documents vary greatly in their estimate of how far Emmaus is from Jerusalem. So throughout history different communities claimed their village was the authentic Emmaus.

As part of our study, we visited three different sites, all claiming to be the original Emmaus. This led me to the personal revelation that the Emmaus journey is not about a place but an experience - a profoundly life changing experience.

Perhaps the Gospel account of the Emmaus Journey has something to say to us about a life changing experience during these challenging times.

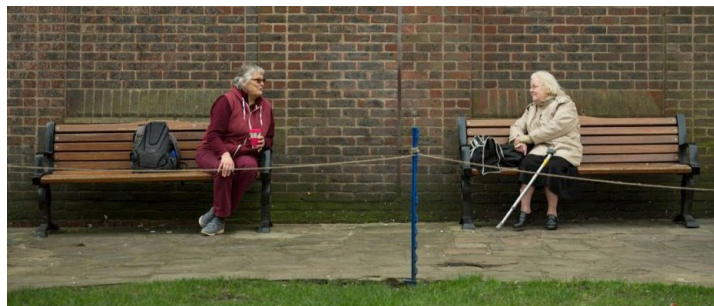
Firstly, the Emmaus journey is about a meeting of persons, the sharing of our common fragility and giving strength to each other.

We hear in the Gospel that the two disciples, their hopes and dreams shattered, invite a stranger to walk with them and they share their fear and disillusionment with him. The stranger, whom they later recognised as Jesus, listened and then brought a new perspective to their experience.

We also hear in this story that as evening fell Cleopas and his companion insist Jesus shares their food and shelter. They make a choice to act generously.

We know how important it is in these uncertain times to go out of our way to connect with others and to participate in genuine interaction - discussing how we feel and engaging in silent listening. It is in our deep listening to others, in our solidarity with them, that we can bring light, a new hope, a new perspective to their lives.

This sharing of our common fragility, may seem a small thing but it is a very basic human need and a very sacred act, an encounter with the Christ.



While our hospitality opportunities are currently curtailed, there are many ways to act generously. There are huge needs in our families, communities and beyond our borders – each requiring a different response. Each of us is able to respond in different ways.

This gospel reading asks us - what is our capacity to 'walk together' with others; to listen to their words, to their needs and not to abandon them as evening falls?

Secondly, this Gospel story calls us to a new way of seeing.

Luke wrote this account with a specific intention in mind. The encounter between the disciples and Jesus is not written as a purely physical, material event. (Luke writes that Jesus is not recognised initially and then he disappears mysteriously when recognised in the breaking of the bread.)

Nor is it written as a purely spiritual event. (Luke's Jesus is not in the appearance of a divine being – he walks, talks, eats and is recognised.)

Luke has balanced the mysterious aspect of the resurrection event with the historical aspect. It was not written to be a witness to the reality of the resurrection.

This account is instructional. The climax of the event is the opening of the eyes, the recognition of the Christ in their presence. Luke is presenting a new understanding about the Christ presence in the community and in the world - a presence they felt 'burning in their hearts.'

So what does it mean to 'open our eyes' during this time of the coronavirus pandemic?

It seems we are being called to a new consciousness - a greater awareness of the Christ, the divine, everywhere, all around us; in us, in our neighbour; in all those who are required at the workplace; those who are mourning and suffering and those who are forgotten.

As our lives slow down, we can see each moment of our day through new eyes. We can become more fully present in

whatever we are doing, in all our small tasks, in our recreation and in our interacting with others.

This Gospel reading challenges us to a new way of seeing and living – a stripping away of distractions, all that is superfluous and living more simply, caring for each other and the earth.

Thirdly, this reading focuses our attention on change. Luke wrote this account to prepare the community for a new understanding, for a major change.

The disciples were expecting Jesus to be a Messiah, a political liberator. They were rushing away from Jerusalem in disappointment after his death. But their eyes were opened and by the end of this story, they are rushing back to Jerusalem filled with a new understanding of the ongoing Christ presence,

In the community and in the world. It was a whole new way of thinking and being. It demanded of them, a dramatic change.

Much has been written and said over the past few weeks about how the world needs to change. Indeed it does, if we are going to survive as a species.

An article in The Saturday Paper called for a Charter of Hope: a new language of shared purpose that could assist us to emerge from this crisis, this common experience of isolation, this shared fragility, as a kinder, fairer country.

The article was talking about our contribution. We can get trapped into thinking our individual lives can stay the same - that our future can be the same as our past.

It could be helpful to reflect on how we are going to change. What are we going to value in the future? How are we going to contribute to a more compassionate, hopeful discourse in order to support change ?

Franciscan Sister and scientist, Ilia Delia, points out that this is a time of accelerated change but also a great opportunity to be shaping a new vision for our world and we all need to be involved in the process.

She says. 'We are co-creators in evolution; we are part of an ongoing cosmic process that demands our commitment to it. If we want a different world, we must become a different people. We need to change from within. When our level of awareness changes, when we have a new consciousness, we can start attracting a new reality.

So how do we change from within? Ilia says we need to dig deep - find the transcendent dimension within us. Joan Chittister calls it the 'sacred space of the heart.' Thomas

Merton called it 'a point or spark at the centre of our being which belongs entirely to God.' Others call it 'presence', 'pure consciousness' or 'our true self'. All agree that at this still point, we open ourselves to change.

It is there that we are able to transform old opinions and expectations into fresh insight and an openness to a new way of living.

It is there that our sense of separateness melts and we become more aware that we are a part of the dynamic whole.

It is there that we find what Richard Rohr calls 'a mystical hope' - a hope, not tied to particular outcomes but rather an unshakeable presence, a sense of being lovingly held.

In conclusion, I believe the Emmaus journey has an important message for these uncertain times.

It is certainly a reminder about journeying together, deep listening and responding generously.

It is leading us on a journey not to Emmaus but within, towards the innermost ground of our being. It is there that our eyes are opened to the risen Christ in everyone and in our world and to a whole new way of seeing.

It is calling us to radical personal change and to a full commitment to our role as co-creators of a new vision for our suffering world.

*Margaret Clifford*

*Adapted from Homily 2/3 May 2020*

# The Transformative Power of Nature

Columbus was an Irish monk who lived in the seventh century. He wrote of Nature, 'If you wish to understand the Creator, first understand his Creation.'

James Durie, writing in The Australian on the weekend of March 7-8, expresses a contemporary attitude to Nature, 'In challenging times we turn to Nature as a source of sustenance, healing and relaxation. And where better to get in touch with it than in our own backyard.'

Challenging times or not, available backyard or not, most of us are aware of the positive effect of Nature on our lives – its beauty, its ability to bring calmness to busy lives, to soften the hard surfaces and outlines of our cities.

Our remote ancestors lived, worked and slept in the bosom of nature. Did they take it all for granted, or did they appreciate its beauty? We can only surmise. Ancient cave paintings in Lascaux in Southern France and in other locations depict remarkable representations of animals. Throughout human history we have responded to Nature through painting, music, song and literature not only with supreme artistry but often in impassioned outbursts. Twentieth century English poet Gerard Manley Hopkins can scarcely restrain his enthusiasm –

*Nothing is so beautiful as spring*

*When weeds in wheels shoot long and lovely and lush*

As well as forming an essential backdrop to our lives Nature provides an arena, a field for countless sporting and cultural activities – from surfing and bushwalking to rock-climbing, mountaineering and skydiving. And of course in her role as Mother, Nature is our nurturer, the very sustainer of our lives.

These connections and examples, all essential to our well-being, are but the entry point, the waiting room, from which we can enter more deeply into Nature. We need to go deeper. Hazrat Inayat Khan was an Indian poet and musician who introduced Sufism to the West. This was in 1914. He writes, 'What attracts the mystic most is Nature. Nature is his bread and wine, his soul's nourishment. The mountains standing so silently, the patient trees, the barren desert not only have a calming effect on the mystic, they express something to him.'

The nineteenth century English poet Wordsworth hints at a similar deeper relationship with Nature –

*For I have learned*

*To look on nature, not as in the hour*

*Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes*

*The still, sad music of humanity,*

*Not harsh nor grating though of ample power*

*To chasten and subdue. And I have felt*

*A presence that disturbs me with the joy*

*Of elevated thoughts; a sense sublime*

*Of something far more deeply interfused...*

In order to drink deeply of what Nature has to offer, to benefit fully from her gifts, we need three things - solitude, silence, stillness; as well as plenty of time. A brief walk in the park will not do it, beneficial though that may be.

I myself walked recently in the beautiful Fitzroy Gardens in Melbourne. I passed a young man with a dog, sitting motionless beside a small stream flowing over rocks. An hour or so later, as I was returning, they were still there, unmoving. Their stillness, their absorption in Nature was palpable.

An organisation in the UK, the Way of Nature, facilitates solo wilderness experiences. In a recent article in The Guardian Weekly, entitled Twenty-four Hours of Solitude, participant Mark O'Connell describes one such trip.

A member of the group went with him to a remote spot in Dartmoor Forest in Devon. There he was deposited, to be picked up twenty-four hours later. He pitched a small tent, roughly marked out with stones and branches a circular patch ten metres in diameter alongside the River Dart, beyond which he was not to go. No phone or watch, no reading or writing materials, no lighting of fires, no food - only water - was permitted.

So what did he do for twenty-four hours? He writes, 'I did nothing, because there was nothing to do.'

At first he experienced utter boredom. He could take a stroll around his small enclosure, he could sit against a tree-trunk. Then he found himself observing small things – the veins on a leaf, the gnarled tree-trunk, the intricacies of an insect, the continuous tumbling of the river-flow. Later he began to hear things - the dripping of water, the faint whirring of insects. After a while he forgot to be bored, forgot the passing of time. He became enfolded in, one with the forest itself. He calls his experience immanence - that is, remaining within, indwelling, being at one with. The writer says that when he woke the following morning he was eager to get back to his river to see how it was doing. By the end of his stint he had begun to experience the transformative power of Nature.

Our Indigenous brothers and sisters have traditionally entered the spiritual world by means of the land. It is called Dadirri, listening to the land. Sam Watson, in his poem 'Stolen Child' writes,

*The land calls upon the four winds  
And the Dreaming awakens-  
The Dreamtime Spirit who creates and heals.*

Last year, visiting Stradbroke Island, I ventured to Deadman's Beach, a small, remote beach, difficult of access. I wrote the following poem in response to that visit -

### **On Deadman's Beach**

*The cliff falls deep, steep, abrupt  
To the gully below*

*Slopes wooded,  
And below,  
Mesh of thick undergrowth.*

*From the high road  
The sole access  
By wooden steps  
Clinging to cliff-face*

*Going down  
I disturbed a kangaroo  
He bounded off  
Through thickets*

*Passing through gully  
To a beach  
Of purest, whitest sand;*

*And beyond,  
The shimmering sea  
  
It was early morning,  
The sun not long risen,  
I, the sole person  
Walking on sea's edge,  
Watching the waves  
As they spent their final breath  
On the sand*

*A gull landed beside me,  
a handsome gentleman  
in black and grey  
with breast of purest white.  
He strutted beside me  
in the shallows  
placing daintily  
his pretty red feet.*

*Before the incoming waves  
We withdrew together,  
companions*

*It was a poem  
Spoken by heaven  
Recalling  
Eden's first splendid morning*

Joan Mooney





# The Smaller the Bigger

The future's come to visit  
Come to make its mark  
Come to draw the curtain  
Turn the lights to dark  
Couldn't see it in the light  
Can't see it in the dark  
Haven't read the signs  
Since Noah and the Ark

*How could we be so blind?  
How could we be so dumb?  
Bigger than ambition  
Smaller than a crumb*

The past's on every corner  
Banging a big bass drum  
Asking for redemption  
For the war we never won  
Couldn't hear it in the tower  
Couldn't hear it from the slums  
The promise of profits  
The kingdom yet to come

*How could we be so blind?  
How could we be so dumb?  
It's bigger than ambition  
Smaller than a crumb*

The present walks in silence  
Like a refugee  
Looking for a scrap of truth  
In centuries of debris  
But it's smaller than a pinhead  
Bigger than desire  
Bigger than the crucifix  
On the temple spire

*How could we be so blind?  
How could we be so dumb?  
Bigger than ambition  
Smaller than a crumb*

Smaller than a grain of sand  
Meeker than the meek  
Wisdom midst the slaughter  
Deeper than the deep

*How can we be so blind?  
How can we be so dumb?  
Bigger than ambition  
Smaller than a crumb*

Robert Perrier



# Pangolins.

A year ago, I had never heard of pangolins. I expect most people had never heard of pangolins. Now they have burst onto the world stage as a suspect source of the Covid-19 virus. Pangolins are the only mammal that is covered by scales. They live on ants, and are shaped rather like an echidna. Their meat is regarded as a delicacy in China, and their scales are used in Chinese medicine.

There is a theory that Covid-19 jumped from pangolins to humans at the Huanan Wholesale Seafood Market in Wuhan, and spread from there to the rest of the world. And maybe it did, but I have some reservations about this theory.

Firstly, I understand that Chinese people have been eating pangolins, and using their scales for generations, so why has the virus jumped now? The jump seems unlikely, but it can't be ruled out. Viruses evolve quickly, so a plausible answer to this question is that Covid-19 recently evolved in pangolins, and then spread to humans.

Secondly, doctors in Wuhan studied 41 patients who were hospitalized in January, and published their findings in The Lancet. They found 28 of the patients had some sort of connection to the Huanan Wholesale Seafood Market, which certainly points the finger at this source. But they also found that 13 had no discernible connection to the market. This is most simply explained by there being a source other than the market, and the market was a means of means of spreading the virus, rather than the source.

Finally, there is the Chinese response to Scott Morrison's call for an international research team to find out where the virus came from, so that we would not have to guess. This is common sense really, and plenty of other authoritative figures have made the same suggestion. But the response of the Chinese Government was astonishing. The Chinese Ambassador threatened a loss of trade. Government sources in China suggested people might look farther than Australia for tertiary study and holidays. Chinese mass media, which can be seen as a reflection of government policy, said the call has damaged the bilateral relationship beyond repair. Also that the Prime Minister's request was made in defiance of rational thought and common sense. And, to round it off, that Australia was like a piece of chewing gum stuck to the sole of the Chinese shoe.

As the number of political and medical leaders repeated the call for an international investigation, the Chinese relented, and said there would be an international investigation when the crisis was past. Which probably means in a year's time, when the trail will have gone cold, and the Chinese Government can prepare carefully and control the result.

The obvious conclusion from this is that the Chinese Government has something to hide, but what could that be? As well as the Huanan Wholesale Fish Market, Wuhan also has the Wuhan Institute of Virology. Here research into viruses is carried out under extremely secure conditions, so as to make sure the viruses do not escape. China can justly be proud of spending the time and money to carry out such advanced and risky research – unless something goes wrong. If it were discovered that Covid -19 had escaped from this lab, the Chinese research community would suffer a severe loss of face.

The Chinese Government can correctly say that eating pangolins is perfectly acceptable, and our dislike of the practice is cultural prejudice. But allowing a virus to escape a lab and kill hundreds of thousands of people is a different matter. The Chinese are proud of their technological sophistication, but a mistake that kills thousands and plunges the world economy into recession does not have any place in that Chinese narrative. <https://youtube/NP71WoxmmBc>

*Peter Brown*



# Self-Isolation



The Pied Butcherbird  
landed on the balcony rail  
fluffed her feathers  
made eye contact  
stretched her long hooked bill  
delivered a flute-like  
comforting song.

The distance between us  
shortened  
she reached across the gap  
with trust and kindness  
in her eyes  
then, she settled in stillness  
her calmness, catching.

I do not know what good I can do  
here, in isolation  
as you live your lives  
in these uncertain times  
but I'm shaping a poem  
and sending it  
filled with the butcherbird's song.

*Margaret Clifford*

*24/03/2020*

# For the Love of Stories

Facts are Boring and Dull. That is why they are hard to remember. However if you put them into the form of stories they are much easier to remember.

Take the story of Newton and the falling apple - Gravity, Archimedes in the bath - Density, Schrodinger's cat - Quantum Mechanics.

Stories don't have to just help explain science. Take the stories of 'the Good Samaritan', 'Romeo and Juliet' and 'Pride and Prejudice'. They point to less defined truths like seeing beyond our prejudices and assumptions.

Stories resonate and touch us deep down. They don't have to be historical facts to do this.

Let's then look at the Bible. Especially at the time between Easter and Pentecost, a time of many stories. There are the appearances to the women in the garden, Thomas, the meeting at the beach, the Emmaus journey, the Ascension and Pentecost.

It is like a religious wonderland where everything appears to be just revealed. However these stories were written over fifty years after Jesus died and the scholars say that none of those stories happened.

So if they didn't happen what did? We don't know. So what is the point of the stories? What do they point to? Michael Morwood (a theologian) prefers asking the question, 'How many years was Easter Sunday?'

After all, the stories came together over many years. The disciples of Jesus were so shaken by Jesus' death. How could God let this happen? Jesus was such a God-filled person. Well, where is God in this?

They turned to scripture (the Old Testament) to look for what God says. They found God to be trusted in stories such as the suffering servant. Hey, Jesus was right. This is what he had said.

Who is Jesus then for us? It wasn't clear. Where is God in the midst of suffering? Let's imagine what may have happened. One person says, 'It may appear that it has all ended but this person changed my life. He gave me dignity and hope.' Another said, 'I can remember hearing Jesus speak and my world was turned upside down.' Then others began to speak and share.

They recognised Jesus was willing to die for what he believed. A man of integrity. They told stories to share that his life is not in vain and that he has changed our lives and given us hope. As we shared more we recognised the admiration we had for Jesus and his teaching. He so lived in love. We recall that if



we live in love then the divine also lives in us. Didn't Jesus ask us to keep his story alive? Didn't he say that the same spirit that was in him was in us? A group of people like us meeting constantly for weeks and months and sharing and telling stories.

The Spirit didn't come down from on high but through sharing, struggling, questioning and telling stories together. The Spirit welled up in them as they began to understand what Jesus was trying to tell them about the Spirit in a way they had not understood before. Just as it does to us today.

It is from this understanding that the stories we know and love emerged.

We meet and break bread as Jesus did. Tell stories and keep his spirit alive in us. That same spirit that was with the first disciples is with us today. The stories though not factual are mythic and powerful with deep truth. The answers we seek are not going to come from out there or on high but from within as they did two thousand years ago. It was not and is not a wonderland but a time of great tension and change but **wow** it is a great adventure that opens our eyes to something much greater.

How blessed we are.

*Kevin Ryan*



# Truth in the Pentecost Story

## *The Hat.*

*The priest looked up from the lectern and cast his eyes over all the hats bowed before him: feathered, frilled, felt hats in rows like faces. But there was one at the end of the row that was different. What was she thinking, a head without a hat? That won't fly here, not in the church.*

*The priest spoke to the young lady afterwards. He said, 'You must wear a hat and gloves in the House of God. It is not seemly otherwise.'*

*The lady flushed, raised her chin, and strode out. 'That's the last we'll see of her,' said the organist.*

*Some weeks later, as the organ rang out, the priest raised his eyes to the rose window. So he didn't see the woman in hat and gloves advancing down the aisle as though she were a bride. The hat was enormous, such as one might wear to the races. The gloves were black lace, such as one might wear to meet a duchess. The shoes were high-heeled, such as one might wear on a catwalk in Paris.*

*And the lady was wearing absolutely nothing else.*<sup>1</sup>

Pastor Dawn, who told me this story, claims it's true, but she admits it didn't actually happen. The truth lies in the metaphor of the story. The power of metaphor is that it points to a truth beyond the words.<sup>1</sup>

When the priest says: 'You must wear a hat and gloves in the House of God. It is not seemly otherwise,' the story is pointing to an abuse of power. It is pointing to conditional acceptance. So, although the story didn't actually happen, the metaphor of it is the truth about power and patriarchy and exclusion.

Many of our scripture stories didn't actually happen either, but they contain truth – metaphorical truth. It is often referred to as religious truth to differentiate it from historical truth. What matters is not whether the stories actually happened. What matters is what we can learn from them. And the learning can be challenging and confronting.

The story of Pentecost is a case in point. It is shrouded in metaphor. That doesn't make it untrue; it just means that it isn't history.

The story of Pentecost is found in the Acts of the Apostles, which was written by the same author who wrote the Gospel According to Luke. We don't know who this writer was. The name Luke was applied much later.<sup>1</sup>

In the Gospel of Luke the writer tells a particular version of the life of Jesus. This gospel is particularly noted for its emphasis on social justice. In the Acts of the Apostles, the same writer tells the story of Jesus followers in the times immediately after his death.<sup>1</sup>



In both the Gospel and in Acts, the writer addresses a character named Theophilus, which in Greek means, Lover of God. The writer addresses the stories to a Lover of God and states that he is writing so that Lovers of God, including us, may have faith.<sup>1</sup>

As Lovers of God we do not read these ancient stories to know the history of events. We read them so that we also may have faith.<sup>1</sup>

To have faith is to embrace the Spirit of God; the spirit of goodness, the spirit of peace, the spirit of justice, the spirit of forgiveness, the spirit of Jesus, the human face of God.

To seek the truth of the Pentecost story, we can look at the story that often accompanies it, the Old Testament story of the Tower of Babel, found in Genesis. (Gen 10:32- 11:9) In that story, the descendants of Noah become so arrogant that they build a tower to heaven. God's response is to give each tribe a different language to speak. What follows is chaos and confusion, competition and tribalism. One tribe eventually



*Tower of Babel, by Breugel (c. 1563)*

becomes the superior one, the chosen one. And the chosen tribe gets to decide who is in and who is out. Boundaries and rules and exclusions are established.



Tribalism pits people and cultures against one another. And this situation was totally ingrained in the culture of first century Palestine. Both the local religious leaders and the Roman occupiers decided who was in and who was out. They maintained peace through control and exclusion. And, yet, that gave people the illusion of living in an orderly and predictable world.<sup>1</sup>

And then along came Jesus who pointed to another way to peace through justice and inclusion, rather than control and exclusion. The story of Pentecost shows the Spirit of God out of the box.

The storyteller uses the symbols of fire and wind to represent the Spirit of God. Next thing we know the apostles can speak all sorts of languages. They are no longer confined to their language, their religion or their tribe. They understand the new world order of inclusion. In Christ, there is no longer the security of division or tribalism. In St Paul's letter to the Galatians we are reminded that in Christ there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all are one in Christ Jesus. (Gal 3:28)

The metaphor of the Pentecost story is a calling to an awakening, an awakening to oneness, oneness with Jews and Muslims, with atheists and agnostics, with the poor and the powerless, with the shunned and the rejected. The Spirit of God is the spirit of inclusion.

But an inclusive world is not necessarily a secure world. In an inclusive world, we can never be quite as sure of things. We can't rely on the predictability of our own society or our own traditions or our own rules. In a tribal world, we know how the others in our tribe are expected to behave, we understand the mores and the culture. In one's own tribe we can feel secure and sure of things. We can feel quite comfortable, quite cosy.

Pentecost is not about being comfortable or cosy. Hence, the symbols of strong wind and fire. Pentecost is about taking risks. It's about breaking down the sort of tribalism that involves dominance and oppression. It's about finding the courage to be uncomfortable.

Journalist, Peter Greste talks about the opposite of tribalism as the grey zone, the space that allows diversity and pluralism and provides for tolerance and dissent without conflict. He says that both Islamic State and George W. Bush wanted to eliminate the grey zone. Their vision of security was tribalism and the demonization of those not part of the tribe.<sup>2</sup>

In our world, asylum seekers get demonized as invaders and terrorists because they are not part of the tribe.

Indigenous cultures are destroyed because they are not part of the tribe either.

The homeless, the mentally ill and the disadvantaged get rejected because they are not part of the tribe.

Pentecost invites us to reclaim the grey zone with all its uncertainty and diversity. Pentecost invites us to listen instead of persuading or rejecting. Pentecost invites us to break down the tribalism that promotes security through exclusion and inequality.

I'd like to borrow from Pastor Dawn again: She asks if we have the wisdom to embrace divinely inspired chaos.

She asks us to imagine a Pentecost where, rather than speaking in languages that we've never understood before, we listen to those who we've never understood before.

She asks us to imagine an audacious Spirit calling us beyond the parameters of our own culture and our own comforts.

To imagine a vision of curious people, learning from others, so that we can all become better people.

She suggests that if the *Reign of God* is to be realized in all its chaotic splendour, we must put on new hats, strip ourselves of tribalism and exclusion and walk brazenly down the aisle.<sup>1</sup>

*Liz Little*

1. *Beyond Tribalism – Preaching a 21st Century Pentecost, ideas gleaned from Clay Nelson, John Shelby Spong, John Dominic Crossan and Marcus Borg, <https://pastordawn.com/2013/05/14/beyond-tribalism-preaching-a-21st-century-pentecost/#more-4209>, posted on May 14, 2013.*

2. <https://omny.fm/shows/on-the-way/on-the-way-peter-greste-and-the-abyss-of-truth>

## Virtual Liturgies

We really like them

We have participated in the Triduum with the SMX Community and appreciate the effort of all concerned to 'gift' us with these very special Liturgies.  
Heartfelt thanks  
Margaret



Doug and I just wanted to thank you all for creating such beautiful liturgies for Easter. Your creativity, awareness of our spirituality needs, musical and your technical abilities, have really shone through in such meaningful and visually beautiful ways.  
We really felt like we were celebrating our connectedness to the community in quite a special and unexpected way. The online liturgies are truly one of the many enriching upsides during this time of social isolation from our dear friends at SMX!! Margaret

The liturgy today was magnificently beautiful, inspiring. Wonderful blessings  
Fondest love,  
Barbara



Peter and I join with the other voices in expressing our appreciation for the online liturgies. We tune in around 9am each Sunday and feel nourished by the music, the prayers and the homily in each liturgy.  
And the graphics are so beautiful!

Maree



# Virtual Liturgies

We really like them

Greatly appreciated the virtual liturgies. They were moving and with beautiful visuals. The detail, the poems, the music and Wendy's playing all excellent. And your homilies portrayed everyone's anxieties and gave such wonderful messages of hope. Loved the whole theme of Lent and the insights of all homilies. Well done and under such pressure too for coming up with quality broadcasts. Ingerid

Thanks to you all for your roles in the liturgies. I have participated in them all, forwarded some to family, and believe they are important in keeping our community spirit alive.  
Fond thoughts to all....  
Maureen.



Thanks. This was such a life giving experience today.  
Thanks to the

Liturgy Committee and the wonderful team that prepares these wonderful liturgies each week. This one was especially moving.

Love to all of you. Peter Crombie



I think our intimate family gathering with lots of candles is in stark contrast to the huge empty Cathedrals. We were delighted to have Terry here yesterday morning and the bread we used was Dutch Easter bread I bake each year. The liturgy group have shared with us their creativity and loving commitment in the deeply moving liturgies we have experienced on line..  
Nelsons



# Celtic Spirituality

The inspiration for this homily grew out of a weekend I spent up at the Archer Mountain Earth Community in October last year entitled A Celtic Journey of the Heart. The Retreat/Workshop on the Saturday and Concert on the Sunday were delivered by Deirdre Ni Chinneide who comes from the Aran Islands off the west coast of Ireland. Deirdre is a psychotherapist/spiritual director as well as a singer and composer. The weekend consisted of ritual, reflection, sharing, poetry and song. I felt there was a certain amount of synchronicity in this weekend as if this was where I was meant to be. I would like to share with you some of the experiences of the weekend as well as further investigations I undertook and some personal reflections.

<https://youtu.be/NP71WoxmmBc>

Celtic culture is thought to have begun to evolve as early as 1200BC. Through migration the Celts spread throughout Western Europe to Britain, Ireland, France and Spain. Before the coming of Christianity the religion practised in Ireland was Druidism. The priests, for whom oak forests were sacred, were teachers, judges, lorekeepers and medical professionals. With regard to the evolution of Christianity in Ireland it is interesting to note that initially Ireland was outside the Roman Empire and therefore its development was more indigenous and localized, incorporating some of the ancient culture. Eventually Rome did enforce its practices but from about the fifth to the eleventh centuries Christianity flourished in a way that seemed more earth-honouring and connected to the landscape. We call this period Celtic Christianity.

Picking up on the chief elements of Celtic Spirituality we can see it is a spirituality that places the skills of the heart – compassion, kindness, reverence, hospitality, listening and openness in a primary position. It corresponds with the view that 'Religion is in the heart, not in the knees'.

Their spirituality embraced all aspects of nature. Columbanus, a great Celtic missionary, wrote, 'If you wish to understand the Creator, first understand His creation.' Celtic Christians referred to the five stringed harp. The five strings were the five senses. What they heard, saw, smelt, tasted and touched spoke



to them of God. It was a sacramental outlook because it saw God in everything. People did not have to climb ecclesiastical walls or learn 'holy God speak' to encounter him. That understanding and reverence is captured in this poem by Christine Valters Paintner.

*Let us see earth as an original monastery.  
The creatures and trees as our spiritual teachers.  
The elements as our spiritual directors.  
The mountains and the flowers as our saints.  
The seasons as our scripture text.  
The forests as the original cathedrals and mosques,  
And liturgy that arises from the original hymn of creation.*

It used rituals such as blessings which offered hope, encouragement, and protection. The Celtic people charted the rhythms of the day with special blessings for getting up, working in the fields, eating and tending the fire. In other words this spirituality was for everyday - not reserved for Sunday observance but infused their daily lives.

It saw the land as a source of life not a resource as we do today. As an agricultural people they relied on the fruitfulness of the fields. Crop failure meant famine and death. Their language was not one of commerce or towns, but of farm and hearth, of natural observation with a deep sense of being part of the environment. Their calendar was based on seasons rather than the modern Gregorian calendar.

It saw music and poetry as the language of the heart.

On the weekend Deirdre delighted us with her singing and had us sing along with her to help us experience this spirituality. We repeated a chant in the Gaelic language many times over, the words 'oscail mo chroi' which translates as 'open my heart'.

The repetition of this chant posed the question to me. Is my heart open? In examining my own response to a friend or random person or a cause requesting help I noticed something. My first response is usually a heart response. I feel I should help or contribute. Then the head kicks in. This is going to cost me time or money or make me feel uncomfortable. Then the moment is gone and I find myself feeling guilt or regret. On the contrary I never regret it when I respond positively. We cannot help everyone in need but we can be aware of this interplay between the heart and the head. I find a good exercise for the heart is to greet and smile at strangers I pass in the course of the day. Sometimes they ignore me but most return the smile or engage in conversation of benefit to both of us. For a lot of people it is a lonely world





out there. Being open minded and opening our hearts to all simplifies our lives. We are not burdened with decisions about who we should love. When we have total acceptance of others the heart becomes free because the ego has been removed and we can be at peace with ourselves and others.

When looking at these attributes of Celtic Christianity as a whole I was struck by how it echoed the spirituality we are gifted with here at St Mary's.

On the weekend we were invited to join in a number of practices designed to attune us to Celtic spirituality. The book entitled *The Soul's Slow Ripening* outlines quite a number of these practices including the practice of encircling which means recalling the presence of Christ through prayer as shield against harm and a reminder of the divine indwelling. The Breastplate of St Patrick which begins, 'Christ within me, Christ before me, Christ behind me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me', was one such prayer.

Another was the practice of solitude and silence. This might mean daily meditation or attending a retreat. On certain feast days in Ireland pilgrims still walk around a sacred site in a sunwise direction uttering traditional prayers. This is called Walking the Bounds.

One practice that appeals to me is that of Learning by Heart. Learning by heart is different to learning by rote. It indicates understanding and willingness to absorb the message. Finding quality poetry and learning as little as a line a day will help to inoculate us against the combative and destructive messages we are often surrounded by. Poetry and music nourish the heart.

Listening with the heart is surely another powerful practice. Not defending, justifying and counterbalancing but walking in that other person's shoes and respecting their opinion even if it does not align with ours.

A final practice of the Celts was 'peregrinatio pro Christo', the call to wander for the sake of Christ. The wandering saints set forth on a journey without destination, sometimes getting into a small boat with no oars or rudder and trusted themselves to 'the currents of divine love'. This serves as a reminder that our

spiritual life is a journey but it is not something that we can plan like going from A to B. It is more like a maze with criss-crossed paths and unwanted detours. Mike Yaconelli put it this way 'Spirituality is not a formula, it is not a test, it is a relationship. Spirituality is not about perfection, it is about connection. The way of the spiritual life begins where we are now, in the mess of our lives. Accepting the reality of our broken flawed lives is the beginning of spirituality, not because the spiritual life will remove our flaws but because it is about God being present in this tangled mess'.

I would like to conclude with a note of optimism encased in this poem by John O'Donaghue.

*Though travel is slow on the journey,  
You will move through its grey valley and come out again  
Where light, colour and promise await to embrace you.  
The brightest moment is when the soul of absence  
Gradually changes into a well of presence.  
'The heart opens to its new beginning,  
Home to the source from which its first breath was  
borrowed'.*

For your own spiritual journey I wish you all Bon Voyage.

*Peter Moss*

# My Reflections on Years spent at St Mary's Church South Brisbane and St Mary's in Exile

The late 1980's and early 1990's were tumultuous times in my life.

You probably know that I am from the Anglican tradition. On a trip to Sydney I met Dr Patricia Brennan who had a significant life-changing influence on my life. Patricia was fired with passion for the leadership of women in the Anglican Church. I was very impressed with the stories Patricia related about women's oppression in the Churches and society. At that point in time my own journey was stepping out of a private sphere to the public sphere of life, changing from seventeen years as a home Mother to starting a University course.

Patricia Brennan, with a group of women and men in Sydney had started an advocacy and reform movement for the ordination of women as priests and bishops in the Anglican Church, MOW. The upshot of my visit to Patricia Brennan was that she urged me to start a branch of MOW in Brisbane, which I did in 1984.

How does all this preamble lead to my presence for many years at St Mary's Catholic Church, South Brisbane, and St Mary's in Exile, which became the place for Father Peter Kennedy and the congregation who were thrown out of St Mary's Church. This followed dictates from the Vatican, carried out by the local Catholic Archbishop.

After all my years of activity in MOW, sweat and tears, money spent bringing women priests from overseas to support us, advocating for women priests and bishops in the Anglican Church (and we sometimes faced fierce opposition) things changed In 1992. The requirement was that the National General Synod of the Anglican Church passed a motion in the House of Laity, Clergy and Bishops, allowing women to be ordained as priests, not bishops, and that happened. We were warned not to engage in too much jubilation!

I stayed in the Anglican Church and tried to find my place as a non-ordained woman which I found difficult for several reasons. I had a strong interest in social justice, conducting educational evenings at our home, with speakers from the Aboriginal community, as a bridge between white and indigenous peoples. I could find no support to publicise these events in my local parish. Other factors also influenced my decision to leave. Women were ordained as deacons, and later priests, but really little changed. They came in at the lowest rungs of the hierarchical Church. I calculated that 4 out of 100 were paid a stipend. I had been used to inclusive language in the liturgies we had in MOW, the imagery of Godde being female as well as male, feminist art work, beautiful banners that we used outside Synods and Churches, and many other images we had of priests and Godde. My



*John and Gwenneth with daughters, Rachel (back) Sophia (forward), grandchildren Olive (left), George (right) and baby Henry.*

expectations were probably very high. But I was spiritually 'burnt out' after my confrontations with some fierce opposition from parts of the established Church e.g. from an organisation, the CHAMPS, Campaign for the Historical Anglican Male Priesthood.

I visited St Marys Catholic Church in South Brisbane, and found a priest with whom I could resonate and be supported. Peter Kennedy was a progressive Christian in every sense of the word. He welcomed women as homilists, inclusive language was used in the liturgies, and every effort was made to include women as equals, even though the Presider at Eucharist still remained the domain of the male priest. Peter was a humble man. If he was not Presider at the Eucharist, he could be seen up the back of the Church ministering to someone in need. Social justice was at the heart of the Gospel. We often had homeless people welcomed, and sleeping in the Church grounds. We witnessed and supported the beginnings of Micah Projects which grew from a very small agency, based on the prophetic words of Micah, to the significant welfare organisation that it became. I was involved in research into domestic violence at that time, and was able to make a contribution to the Church on that topic.

After some years, and many threats from the Catholic hierarchy, Peter Kennedy's use of inclusive language was reported to the Vatican. His final heretical action, according to the Vatican, was the use of the language 'Creator, Redeemer and Sanctifier' instead of 'Father, Son and Holy Ghost' in baptismal services. These were tumultuous times for the hundreds of people who attended St Mary's, many of them being Catholics who were disillusioned with the institutional Church. I became very close to friends who remain so to this day. Finally, Peter Kennedy was deprived of his faculty which meant that he was not able to practise as a priest in the Archdiocese of Brisbane. Terry Fitzpatrick remained as the Assistant Priest at St Mary's. He was from the Toowoomba

Diocese so was virtually invisible in the Brisbane Archdiocese, as far as the hierarchy were concerned. Terry was a great pastor to the people and remains so to this day.

It was in this tumultuous time that big decisions had to be made about the future of St Mary's community whose people had very mixed feelings about a Church without Peter Kennedy. A decision was made for the community to go with Peter Kennedy into exile; hence the present name of the community. This community which had been so instrumental in ministering to the homeless and disadvantaged people was offered a physical space, rental free, on the second floor of the Trades and Labour Council building, very close to the St Mary's Church in South Brisbane, and has remained there. Although this has been a very generous gift, I think we lost our 'shop front' presence which has been a disadvantage to the community's outreach.

It was Easter 2009 when the exiled community marched from the Church building to their new space. John and I joined



them, carrying a banner that said, 'The law kills, the Spirit gives life'. Then ensued another tumultuous time when the community was trying to find its new identity. This was a time when most of us felt traumatised by the severe edicts of the Vatican, and lots of different ideas were tossed around as to our future. Peter Kennedy found freedom where he was able to exercise more fully his mystical presence. He was thrust into the media spotlight by the actions of the Catholic Church. On his own self admission Peter was not used to handling the media, so when he declared that he doubted the historicity of Christ, many thought he had 'lost the plot'. Some left the community because it wasn't Catholic enough, and others thought it had become too Protestant. Some could not make sense of the readings from Eckhart Tolle, the Christian mystic. So the remnant remained, going through iterations of what form the liturgy would take, and what would remain from the

Catholic Eucharist. I remember my husband John, and others, disagreeing when the traditional Lord's Prayer was replaced with an Aramaic version. John and others were saying, 'We mustn't throw the baby out with the bath water'. But I think there was a general feeling not to be tied down with some of the archaic doctrines of the Catholic Church.

So where does that leave me now? Many of you know that my tradition is Anglican, and I certainly did not convert to Catholicism when I saw the 'goings on' of the centralised Catholic Church.

I live around the corner from St John's Cathedral in the City. It is not surprising that I have returned to the Anglican tradition, a community led by the Dean, Peter Catt. Whilst I have often sat on the fringes of the institutional Church, my spiritual journey has gone full circle, from my presence 'outside' the Cathedral, holding protest banners supporting women's ordination as priest and bishops, to inclusion in a diverse community. As regards women priests, I really have come full circle, from an activist for the ordination of women, to the relationship with the women priests and deacon on the staff of the Cathedral, with whom I experience mutual respect.

So what is my relationship with St Mary's in Exile now? I consider that I am still part of two communities. I am an active supporter of the small community which exercises a ministry of Christian fellowship and service. I may not be a physical presence at SMX, except for special occasions, but I remain in fellowship with some of my very close friends from the community. In hindsight, I see my journey as being a place where Godde wants me to be, as sure (or maybe) as one can be in this earthly life.

*Gwenneth Roberts*



# The Greatest of These...

The subject tonight is love  
And for tomorrow night as well  
As a matter of fact  
I know of no better topic  
For us to discuss until we die.  
*(Hafiz, 14th century)*

In contemporary popular culture, love gets a lot of airplay. In my/our youth, the Beatles and the Beach Boys and others used this theme again and again. Lyrics like 'All you need is love...', 'What the world needs now is love sweet love...'. Then, while the senseless war in Vietnam raged, there was that slogan of the sixties: 'Make love, not war.'

These sentiments all carry a half truth, but generally, they avoid the deeper, costly truth about love. They certainly do not address the capacity of us human beings to embrace a twisted view of love, which can manifest itself as an abuse of power and ultimately violent control.

After a lifetime following the Jesus Way this elderly mystic says God is love – ...so wherever you see this love in practice you see God. And furthermore, if we are to know this loving God, we have to love one another.... 'Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is Love'.

'God is Love'. If you need a creed, there's one for you.

What are we, today, to make of these uncompromising words from the New Testament? Particularly, what is the new law of Love, this 'new commandment' all about?

With its attachment to love which is built on physical attraction and the comfort of friends, our human nature struggles with the idea that we should love those who don't love us. The love Jesus is talking about is more than a reciprocal arrangement. It goes beyond mutuality. Love takes us beyond a preoccupation with survival. It frees us to give ourselves away. Indeed this love thrives on a kind of carefree extravagance and generosity. At times it even bends the rules.

Above all else, this love is inclusive. It redefines the notion of 'neighbour' to include even our 'enemies', so it certainly includes prisoners, prostitutes, LGBTI persons, drug addicts, asylum seekers and those of different cultures and religions.

Love is a verb, not a noun. It is not so much about adhering to right beliefs as it is about acting rightly and lovingly in all relationships. It is about living to our potential as human beings, which is another way of saying it is about living like children of the God of love.

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There are three synonyms which may better explain this God-like love in practice. How it is not just a romantic dream:

Love as compassion

Love as Social Justice

Love as grace

Compassion is love entering empathically and tenderly into the feelings of the other. Love as compassion is much more than pity or charity. Compassion nurtures but does not consume.

The call to compassion often comes through suffering and woundedness. Medico Rachel Remen has written of the limits of medical science to effect cures: 'Only other wounded people can understand what is needed, for the healing of suffering is compassion, not expertise.....This is a lesson I have learnt again and again from my visits to cancer patients in hospital and in the suffering of my own body.'

Of course, suffering and woundedness can come to us in various forms. Whatever the form it comes to you, be compassionate to yourself and especially to others for that is the way through such dark periods.

Living by the The Golden Rule - which is found in all religions - is an expression of compassion. And the Golden Rule has many applications. The famous Redfern speech by a former Australian Prime Minister invoked the Golden Rule. This PM spoke candidly of the way indigenous peoples and their cultures were damaged and literally destroyed at times. Then this PM Keating reminded us of our national failure to ask as compassion would, 'What if that were done to me (to us)?' adding, 'As a consequence we failed to see what we were doing degraded all of us.'



In the name of compassion I am impatient to hear a contemporary Prime Minister acknowledge that about the cruel policy of prison-like detention for asylum seekers.



So, another lesson I have learnt is that Love's movement is always toward social as well as personal transformation. Love is redemptive and reconciling, inspiring new visions of a better world, freeing us from oppression and illusions. So Love points to social justice and a culture which sustains life.

Social Justice can be described as 'compassionate love distributed through society.'

Loving our neighbour in the Jesus way extends our responsibility. So we may say love of neighbour extends not only to all fellow human beings but to all life on Earth.

And then there is Love as Grace. Thank goodness; because perfect love remains for each of us an 'impossible possibility'. While love is the essence of my life's credo, it is also the most searching spotlight on my moral failures. Who of us, individually and collectively, can live the life of love perfectly, across the decades ? We all need saving, redeeming, forgiving and amazing grace. This is the message at the heart of the Jesus story.

Decades ago I had to learn the Methodist catechism (a little green book). I have forgotten most of it. The one I remember best was the shortest. 'What is Grace?' The answer, 'Grace is the undeserved love of God freely given to all.'

Rejection

Something amazing happened just this morning, I thought I should share. I was suffering a migraine and feeling rejected last night. Drowning in this emotion in bed, unable to sleep, I held myself in this feeling, simply holding the feeling of rejection itself, waiting for it to pass. Then I decided to take the plunge, radically enter into the rejection emotion and savour its fullest. After I delved into it, I felt, 'Gee.... I didn't die! ... I didn't die from rejection ... I didn't die from its pain.' While I was still holding, suddenly, my mind's eye opened up and I was dying on the cross, feeling rejected. I was Jesus dying physically in my pain. I felt, 'Not long now .... just bear it ...' Abruptly without notice, the cross scene disappeared and my mind dropped into a deeper dimension of awareness, one that was peaceful and loving. I felt the authentic truth, that 'I simply want to create beauty.' In this pure truthful surreal state, it was not even about others, or about pleasing others, or for approval or disapproval. It was simply about creating beauty, fullstop. Nothing more. The state was complete in itself, empowering in itself, simple be-ing yet profound. This Easter way of dying to the flesh, till resurrection, is finally comprehended.

Grace Yap 15 May 2020

That definition is wonderful but it needs expanding or expounding. By that I mean simply that this free gift, wonderful as it is, is also costly. Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German Christian whose life and writings have influenced my own discipleship. He was assassinated by the Nazis for his stand against the evil of Hitler's regime. Part of his journey was to realise that most of us Christians and the church by and large take the gift of grace cheaply. He taught and lived that Grace is costly...and he paid the price. In the name of the God who is love I must ask myself and you: have we cheapened grace; what does costly grace mean in our lives?

So, Love as Grace lifts our sights to new possibilities. As Archie Roach's refrain says: 'Love means it's never too late to turn things round.'

In the great scheme of evolving life, we human beings are the custodians in the cosmos of love as compassion, as social and eco- justice, as grace.

Noel Preston  
Adapted from his homily  
SMX 23rd Feb. 2020



Lockdown

meaningless artwork	images dawn
perhaps a shoulder	out of the black mess
or peep of leg lines	personal stories unfold
accented	and what I need to hear
over the days	in captivity

Grace Yap

# Tuning into Love

I'd like to share with you why I think the single most transformative thing we can do for ourselves and the world, is to tune ourselves to love.

Jesus tells us the greatest thing we can do is love God with all our heart, our soul and all our mind, because in doing so we can transform our world. Not just our inner world but our external world as well.

At this moment in history we are at a tipping point to great change. Whether it be a cleaner, greener planet or peace, health and harmony within our communities. What we envisage, is within our power to create. And so, truly, this tipping point lies within you.

You are probably questioning just how tuning your hearts to love can transform and change the world that you see before you.

The miracle that can unfold when you do, is encapsulated in the discoveries of Dr Maseru Emoto. That matter is changed and transmuted by the energy of intention. And it is the energy of love that restores nature to its perfect form.

Dr Emoto, a Japanese scientist performed the most unusual experiments on water. He took glass jars of water and stuck labels on the jars. 'Love' or 'Thank You', 'Let's do this' ... but then other labels said 'You fool', 'You make me sick' or 'I will kill you'. Having frozen the water, he then took photographs under a microscope of the frozen water molecules.

Incredibly, the water crystals that had been shown words of gratitude and love were transmuted into the most beautiful, symmetrical crystals. The water that had been given 'hateful' words or even ignored resulted in deformed and distorted crystals.



*Compassion*

The gift these photographs bring the world I believe is extraordinary. How could anyone utter or even think 'ugly' words again. The water experiments shed even more light on the notion that what you think you become.

For me, these photographs reveal that thoughts, prayers, intention are all codes of information that can be transferred through space and influence matter. Remember everything

in this Universe is energy. Where we focus our thoughts is where our energy is flowing.

This explains miracles and healings, which in themselves are similar transformations - of matter releasing all negative frequencies and returning to their perfect form.

When Jesus turned that water into wine, it became a drink like no other. Perhaps this wine enjoyed by the wedding guests at Cana is just a metaphor. Jesus took ordinary water and changed it into something that had the same power and potential as wine. The reason we drink wine is because we will be changed - we will feel better, happier, joyous, carefree. All our worries will evaporate, all our suffering forgotten and we feel like we can dance and sing and really celebrate life. Jesus turned water into this same elixir. And indeed, we all can.

If water is changed by the vibrations of thought or intention, it means we too are changed by that which we cannot see. Think of just how powerful this knowledge is. We are indeed powerful co-creators simply through our focused intention and our ability to transmit our own energy frequency.

In placing your loving thoughts upon the water you drink, the water that will become you... you are after all 70% water. Your whole body will be infused with love. And this is also true for the planet. And, of course, the opposite is true. I suggest you try leaving words of affirmation around your home, on your fridge, on your bathroom mirror. We now know that words carry their own frequency and have power.

There is one more thing I'd like to share with you all about the power of tuning to love and that is the emotional frequency vibration scale. You can do your own google search to check out the scale more closely.

To tune into love we must understand our thoughts are like a radio signal; emitting waves of energy, which we call emotion. Like words of intention, these emotions generate a frequency, like all energy does.

Take a look at the scale at the end of the text. The lower, heavier frequencies feel like shame, guilt, and fear.... the higher the frequency the lighter and more beautiful the emotion feels to us. And love is way up the scale.

To tune into love - peace and joy - we must transcend the lower vibrational frequencies of guilt, shame, apathy, grief and fear....

Your emotions are really just an internal guidance system that indicates to you if you are 'in the Kingdom' or waiting outside the gates.

So observe the thoughts your mind is resting upon (they are not 'you' by the way). I imagine thoughts and beliefs are like balloons that hover in the energy field around us and our minds are like a hand that grasps the string of these hovering balloons. Watch and see what happens when you release your grasp. When you let it go that thought will just float away. It is a great game to play. You can actually choose the thoughts you take hold of. The thing is some of those balloons you have been holding for a very long time... for so long you think they are an extension of you. They're not. You can release them.

Love is waiting- love is patient and kind because it really is impossible to leap from here to there. So be kind to yourself. The duality of life happens to us all; we can't escape the lower frequencies - what I'm learning is we are actually here to transmute these.

I believe we are all a fragment of God wanting to know thy self. God wouldn't know He is love without experiencing the polarity of it... fear. We need to move there ourselves. Nothing can push or coerce or drag me there... it's up to me.

I believe the angels moving up to heaven are a metaphor of movement up the energy vibrational scale. They are God's messengers to remind us when we are on the right path towards this kingdom within. Now at this time, what a beautiful opportunity we have been given. To look within and see what balloons we are holding onto that we should let go. Some of these balloons carry heavy, denser energies and once we let them go we will feel so much lighter.

The more balloons we can take that are filled with love and gratitude and joy and peace the lighter we become and the

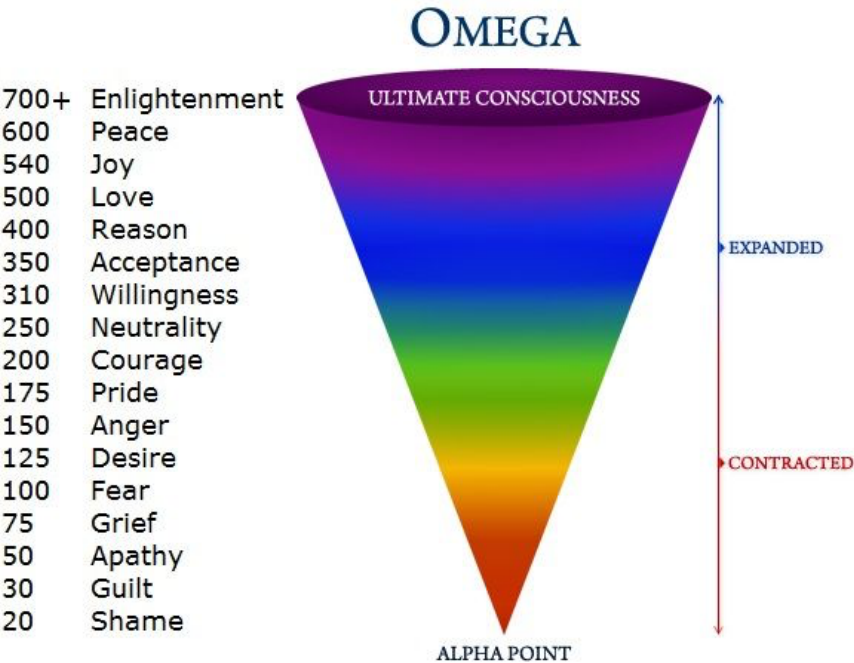
more we can elevate to our true self. The things that get us out of our heads and into the present moment. The simple things, like cooking, gardening, painting, organising our homes, walking, sewing, tinkering, designing, building, knitting are all forms of meditation. And meditation, the stilling of the mind allows the energy from above to flow to us once more.

Sometimes people say - they 'lost themselves' in that activity they love but really I think they are 'finding themselves' - they have merely lost what was holding them down. Go within and notice when your mind is running the show and keeping you anchored. Step back and look at the thoughts infiltrating your mind like a thief in the night! I now laugh out loud when I catch myself grabbing a thought that has me spiralling down the vibrational scale like sliding down a snake in a game of snakes and ladders. I have to intentionally re-direct my thoughts to get back up that ladder. One rung at a time.

Transformation is a process or experience that changes and re-shapes our lives .... where, like the water we 'become something new' ... the water in Dr Emoto's experiments was still water. You are always you. Think of transformation more like a re-configuration. And just like a caterpillar emerging from its cocoon, this process is not without struggle. Because the butterfly would not understand exquisite joy in the spreading of her wings if she had not first experienced the suffocating darkness and restriction of the cocoon.

Whether you are aware of it or not something transformative is taking place right now and because you are here, you are creating a new world so I invite you each day each moment to tune yourself to love.

Alison Walker





# The Tree of Life

Oh, for love and passion  
May they arise in joy  
Creating the beautiful  
Giving smiles to all

They are waiting within  
To glow with purpose  
They harbour the dreams  
The longings of all

We're many in oneness  
We're in this together  
Each playing our part  
For wholeness to be

Love is patient  
It never gives up  
Passion is strong  
It propels us on

Oh, Life's precious gifts  
Could they be misused?  
Awareness, Please!  
Be still and know

All is revealed  
In the greenening and glory  
The apple of the eye  
Being tree of life

The kangaroo and emu  
Can now peacefully be  
Under the benevolent  
Tree of Life

Gazing at the tree of life  
I am remembering  
I am standing on holy ground  
Roots firmly on what is

Barbara Fingleton

*I would like to acknowledge Michelle Harris. Her art and her words inspired the above.*



# Healthy, Holy Laughter

If I asked you the question. Did Jesus laugh? What would you say? I might have said, We don't know. But after some research on the subject I'm coming to an answer. So let's see. What do we know about:

- Laughter for health?
- Laughter in the Christian Church?
- Laughter in the bible?
- Laughter from Jesus?

## **Laughter is the best medicine.**

Human beings are the only species that have a sense of humour and enjoy a good laugh. Medical Research shows the following:

- Laughter enhances the blood flow to the body's extremities and improves the function of the heart and blood vessels
- Laughter releases endorphins and other natural mood-elevating and pain-killing hormones
- Laughter leads to the release of oxytocin, a feel-good hormone
- Laughter reduces the release of cortisol, a stress hormone
- Laughter improves the transfer of oxygen and nutrients to internal organs
- Laughter boosts the immune system and helps the body fight off cancer as well as viral bacterial and other infections.
- So Laughter is the best medicine, it is effective and has no adverse side effects.

## **Laughter clubs**

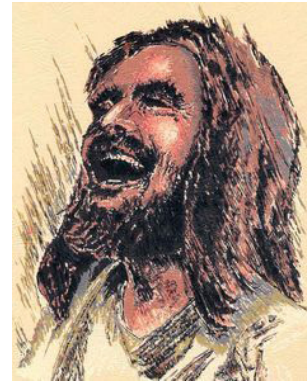
The idea of laughter clubs is to gain the benefits of laughter by laughing for no reason. In a laughter club it's not necessary to tell jokes, or to be in a good mood, to be a humorous person or even to feel like laughing. At a laughter club you practise laughing until it becomes more natural. You fake it until you make it.

Since they began in India in 1995 laughter clubs or laughter yoga, it's the same thing, have spread to more than 3,000 clubs worldwide. In Australia alone there are no less than 5,000 practitioners of laughter yoga.

## **Laughter and love**

In his book *Laughter and the Grace of God*, Brian Edgar a professor of Theology writes the following:

- Laughter is at the heart of a loving relationship because we cannot really love anybody with whom we never laugh.
- At a purely human level the ability to laugh is one of, if not the most valued qualities in relationship with life partners.
- Humour and laughter are not additional to or just a consequence of a relationship, they are in a very real sense part of the relationship itself.
- Similarly a shared sense of humour with God is part of one's relationship with God.



- So laughing together is as important for our relationship with God as it is for any other intimate relationship.

## **Laughter and religion**

The Greek philosopher Plato found the passages in Homer's Iliad and the Odyssey were disturbing especially where Mount Olympus was said to ring with the laughter of the gods.

He protested, 'If anyone represents men of worth as overpowered by laughter we must not accept it, much less if gods laughed.' Another of Plato's objections to laughter was that it was malicious.

The early church fathers adopted a humourless outlook. St John Chrysostom wrote, 'In the gospels Christ never laughed.'

In the late 16th century Puritans and other Christians used biblical teachings to describe laughter, happiness and pleasure as suspect and undesirable. Making matters worse, they frequently tried to impose their doleful philosophy on other people.

Archbishop Dennis Hart once sent out a letter to priests saying, 'Don't allow football songs at funerals and don't tell jokes in your sermons.'

St Francis was determined to reform the church which was in every way in a state of disrepair. He was a joyful humorous person who spoke to the birds and called himself...

## **A Holy fool**

Christian authors such as C.S. Lewis and G.K. Chesterton have helped us understand the theological importance of humour. Chesterton said: 'The gigantic secret of God is mirth.' And also: 'Life is serious all the time but living cannot be. You may have all solemnity you wish in your neckties but in anything importance such as sex, death and religion you must have mirth or you will have madness.'

Jesus wept but did he laugh?

# Healthy, Holy Laughter (cont)

## What do we know of Laughter in the New Testament?

Jesus is one who enjoyed celebrations. He notably helped things along at the wedding feast of Cana by maintaining the wine supply. That was his first miracle. He was accused of being a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners.

One of his favourite images of God's Kingdom was a royal wedding celebration. Nobody ever accused Jesus of being a humourless wowser, or colourless puritanical killjoy.

Jesus happily joined others in feasting and drinking as well as fasting. In the Sermon on the Mount he called on his disciples to be happy or blessed. This teaching of Jesus refers to the happy spiritual state of those who live in peace without trouble. The joy of those in the kingdom of heaven becomes laughter and stands in contrast to the unrighteous who he warns may laugh now but later on they will mourn and weep.

Those who follow Christ should, 'rejoice and be glad because great is your reward in heaven' (Matthew 5:12).

The teaching of Jesus is clear. Joy and laughter should be hallmarks of Christ's disciples. Jesus used humour stories and in public debate in the same way that our political cartoonists condemn public figures with the use of comical but incisive illustrations. Some of Jesus' most powerful images are in Matthew chapter twenty three where Jesus condemns the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. They regulate the minor of details of life including tithing kitchen herbs but they leave neglected the big issues like justice, mercy and integrity. He calls them blind guides who strain out a gnat but swallow a camel... Now that's a joke.

Jesus was educated in the home and the local synagogue. He joined in regular community events such as weddings and funerals rejoicing with those who rejoiced and mourning with those who mourned. He learned the wisdom of Ecclesiastes (chapter 3) as sung by Joan Baez:

*A time to weep and a time to laugh.  
A time to mourn and a time to dance.  
And a time for every purpose under heaven.*

Jesus' life real life experiences are shown by his down-to-earth illustrations. These gave his teaching credibility and moral authority.

In Mark's Gospel we read, The large crowd listened to him with delight Mark 12:37.

Jesus made a joke about John the Baptist's clothing in Matthew 7.

As John's disciples were leaving, Jesus began talking about him to the crowds. 'What kind of man did you go into the wilderness to see? Was it a weak reed, swayed by every breath of wind? Did you go into the desert to see the latest fashions? No, you would go to the king's palace for that.

So what is the answer to my question; did Jesus Laugh?

We have learned that laughter is good for your physical and mental health. Laughter does have an important role in religion. So how can we, God's creatures, think things are funny unless the whole idea of humour came from God in the first place? And unless we see that side of God, I'm not sure we can totally appreciate him.

Jesus had a sense of humour, enjoyed parties and drinking. Many of his parables, sayings and stories are ironic and funny. He would definitely have laughed a lot.

*Homily given by Frank Rosenfeldt at Inclusive Catholics  
Eucharist Sunday March 1st 2020*

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# 'Yes' in times of 'No'

Yes, there is fear  
Yes, there is isolation  
Yes, there is panic buying  
Yes, there is sickness  
Yes, there is even death

But...

They say that in Wuhan after so many years of  
noise

You can hear the birds again  
They say that after just a few weeks of quiet  
The sky is no longer thick with fumes  
But blue and grey and clear

They say that in the streets of Assisi  
People are singing to each other  
across the empty squares  
keeping their windows open  
so that those who are alone  
may hear the sounds of family around them

They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland  
Is offering free meals and delivery to the  
housebound

Today a young woman I know  
is busy spreading fliers with her number  
through the neighbourhood  
So that the elders may have someone to call on

Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and  
Temples  
are preparing to welcome  
and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary

All over the world people are slowing down and  
reflecting

All over the world people are looking at their  
neighbours in a new way  
All over the world people are waking up to a new  
reality

To how big we really are  
To how little control we really have  
To what really matters  
To Love

So we pray and we remember that  
Yes, there is fear  
But there does not have to be hate  
Yes, there is isolation  
But, there does not have to be loneliness  
Yes, there is panic buying  
But, there does not have to be meanness  
Yes, there is sickness  
But, there does not have to be disease of the  
soul  
Yes, there is even death  
But, there can always be a rebirth of love

Wake to the choices you make as to how to live  
now

Today, breathe  
Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic  
The birds are singing again  
The sky is clearing, Spring is coming  
And we are always encompassed by Love

Open the windows of your soul  
And though you may not be able  
to touch across the empty square,  
Sing

*Fr. Richard Hendrick, OFM  
March 13th, 2020*



