

# **What Really Matters Right Now**



**St Mary's Matters**

Contents

Right Now  
*Michael Tansky*

Prophets of Justice  
*Liz Little*

Making Room  
*Margaret Clifford*

Love Tenderly...  
*Narelle Mullins*

Walk Humbly With Your God  
*Margaret Clifford*

Sacred Wisdom  
*Ingerid Meagher*

Listening and Treaty  
*Anne Brown*

Stabilitas Loci  
*Margaret Clifford*

Martha of Bethany  
*Liz Little*

Ted  
*Shiloh Moore*

Live with Light  
*Jan Murray*

A Reflection  
*UC Forum*

The Updated Eight Points of Progressive Christianity  
*UC Forum*

Coochi Mudlo Island Retreat  
*Photo story*

At Home with Oneself  
*Narelle Mullins*

Exile  
*David Melville*

A Stranger has Entered our Journey  
*Tony Hempistall*

Ash Wednesday  
*Jan Richardson*



From the Editor

The cover of this magazine is meant to be a little enigmatic. What is that hand holding?. Maybe a globe of the earth (we hold the future of the earth in our hands) maybe a cystal ball (can anyone predict our future) maybe a simple glass ball reflecting his world (reminding him how beautiful and fragile it is) or maybe something else. What do you think?

Our community is back togehter again and we survived the separation, not least in part to the amazing online liturgies put together by the liturgy group. Wendy’s music, John’ graphics and artistic direction, Terry reading and getting excellent homilists (himself included), all helped by the organisational skill of Liz and Marg. Thanks you to you all.

There is good stuff in this edition. It includes a lovely poem by a visitor, who came as a courtesy to his host, and liked what he discovered . Thanks Dave.

Enjoy!

Marg Ortiz (Editor)

The Fluid Mystery of God

*Peter Breen*

The Tree of Life

*Barbara Fingleton*

The Prayer of Jesus

*Jo Inkpin*

Right Now

Wattle is flowering  
Ibis are flying  
Sun is gleaming  
Blue sky beaming  
Trees are weaving  
Traffic flowing  
John Butler singing  
While we are being  
Our hearts gleaming  
In oneness with each other  
Cooling the planet  
Preserving and sustaining life  
Our interconnection with All life  
The galaxy  
The universe  
Everything  
Liberating the oppressed  
Feeding the hungry  
Peaceful and harmonious  
coexistence with all

Black lives DO  
matter  
Stop killing Aboriginal people  
Freedom from domestic violence  
From pain  
From the anguish of suffering  
Losing a loved one  
Losing our job  
Our mind  
Hope.  
  
Take stock every moment  
Ask myself  
What really matters right now  
And I am surprised what follows....  
The unexpected  
The joyous  
The perfect brilliant stillness  
The gleaming radiant jewel  
Our heart!

*Michael Tansky*



Jarrawoa by M.S.Mickeloo

# Prophets of Justice

In Advent 2020 we were seeking to revisit our roots and to re-centre ourselves at the end of a rather different year, by looking at a familiar quote from the Old Testament prophet, Micah: Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God. This homily reflects upon Acting Justly.

The word justly can have many meanings. We have a justice system that's concerned with punitive justice, the application of appropriate and consistent punishments for crimes committed.

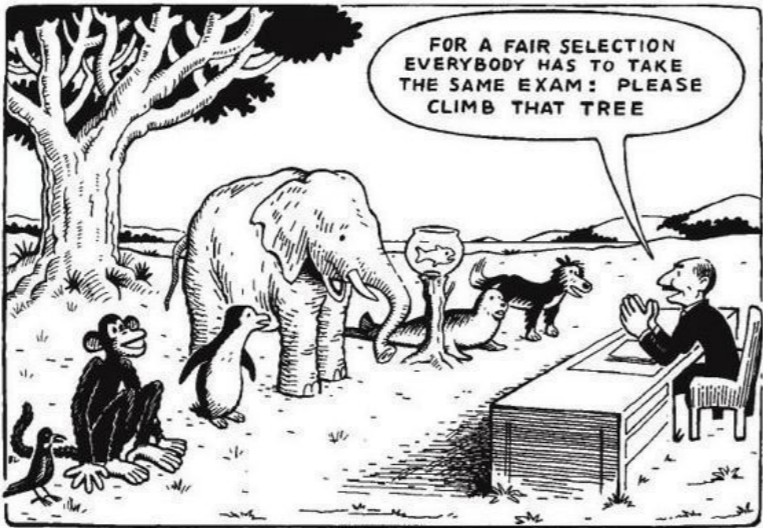
But the prophet Micah spoke of Biblical Justice, which is not punitive justice. It is distributive justice – the fair distribution of the earth's blessings. It's about the common good and it focuses on things like human dignity, stewardship of the land and social and economic equality. Our contemporary term for Biblical Justice is Social Justice and it's always been a key focus of our community. It's how we see our Christian mission.

Biblical Justice has a few interesting characteristics. Firstly, it is difficult because it can contradict human interest and its focus success and dominance. Biblical justice is about principles and people<sup>1</sup> and the inherent and equal worth of all persons.

Secondly, Biblical Justice is not unique to Christianity. The vengeful god of the Hebrew scriptures is often reacting to the human tendency to selfishness and greed, the opposite of sharing the blessings of the earth.

Thirdly, the quest for Biblical Justice seems to have been an issue for humans forever. It was an issue for Jesus; it was an issue for the ancient Hebrews and it is an issue for us.<sup>1</sup>

We're familiar with the story of the Exodus from Egypt, the flight to freedom from the oppression of the Pharaoh. Once the promised land was reached, it came to be ruled by Kings such as Saul, David and Solomon, and, according to scripture scholar, Marcus Borg, the kings dominated just as the Pharaoh in Egypt did. Society was once again ruled by a few wealthy elites who owned the land and taxed the workers. This was the world in which the prophet Micah and the other prophets lived around the seventh century BCE.<sup>2</sup>



And those prophets called on people to let go of selfish temptations and return to God's justice and equality. The writer of Luke's Gospel even has Jesus himself quoting from one of the Old Testament prophets, Isaiah, when he says: In the scroll of the prophet Isaiah ... it is written: the ... Lord ... has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed. (Luke 4:14-21)

The prophet who is the most passionate about Biblical Justice is Amos. He is scathing about the dominance of the elite.<sup>2</sup> He says: *Because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain, you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them; you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine.* (Amos 5: 11) Amos accuses the elite of turning justice into poison and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood. (Amos 6: 12) He calls some of the female elite, *cows of Bashan ... who oppress the poor, who crush the needy. The time is surely coming upon you when they shall take you away with ... fish-hooks.* (Amos 4: 1-2) And so on it goes for nine chapters of colourful condemnation.

But despite the best efforts of the prophets, the issues of dominance and inequality were still around in Jesus' time, when the Roman occupiers dispensed justice by conquering and created peace through military oppression. The land in which Jesus lived belonged to Caesar – the land, the animals, the food, the people.<sup>3</sup> Jesus saw his mission as the prophets saw theirs, in terms of distributive justice, the equal sharing

of the world's blessings. And Jesus was pretty clear that his mission is also our mission. In Matthew's Gospel we are told in no uncertain terms to give food to the hungry, to give drink to the thirsty, to welcome the stranger, to give clothing to the naked and to visit the sick and the imprisoned. (Matthew 25:31-46)

Clearly we are called to act justly, not just to understand justice, to be the prophets of our time and to recognize where oppression and inequality exist in our culture. We are called to see clearly what can so easily be taken for granted and not scrutinized, often because the powerful find it acceptable. We are called to recognize the businesses that exploit people and the land, to challenge policies that oppress the poor and the powerless and to reflect upon our own actions and lifestyles that do not enhance the equal worth of all.

Acting justly can take courage and perseverance and a willingness to call out established behaviours.<sup>1</sup> Theologian, G.K. Chesterton said that the Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting; it has been found difficult and left untried.<sup>3</sup>

Acting justly can be overwhelming. Success doesn't come rapidly and it's easy to become discouraged and burnt out. Oscar Romero lost his life in his quest for justice for the poor and oppressed. He advised that: *We cannot do everything and there is a sense of liberation in realizing that. This enables us to do something and to do it very well.*<sup>4</sup>

Richard Rhor's advice is to combine action always with contemplation to ensure that our action is well directed and so that we don't burn out. He sees contemplation as the process of discerning which something to do and finding a way to do it. He speaks of identifying what's ours to do and he says that action and contemplation are a continuous back and forth.<sup>5</sup>

Here at SMX the desire to live out the challenge of acting justly is what has brought us together as community. Together we explore our Christian calling, contemplate individually and together what is ours to do and that we support one another in our actions.

So, as we revisit our SMX roots and re-centre ourselves as a community, let's continue to feel Romero's sense of liberation in knowing that we can't do everything, but that we can do something and do it well. Robert Kennedy says that *few will have the greatness to bend history ..., but each of us can work to change a small portion of events. It is from numberless diverse acts of courage ... that human history is shaped. Each time we stand up for an ideal, ... or strike out against injustice, we send forth a tiny ripple of hope, ... and we dare all those ripples to build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression.*<sup>6</sup>

(Advent Homily delivered by Liz Little on 6th December, 2020)

Footnotes:

1. <https://www.ministrymagazine.org/archive/2008/03/to-act-justly.html>
2. <https://marcusjborg.org/social-justice-in-the-book-of-amos/>
3. <https://whosoever.org/peace-through-justice-reflections-on-a-lecture-by-john-dominic-crossan/>
4. Richard Leonard, SJ, 2015, What are we Doing on Earth for Christ's Sake?, Paulist Press, New Jersey.
5. <https://cac.org/ours-to-do-2020-01-12/>
6. <https://www.catholica.com.au/forum/index.php?mode=thread&id=237302>

# Making Room

Is there any room for you to be born?

Any space in this mind,  
heavy with its own importance?

Any time slot is this unravelling day,  
full of its own agendas?

Any place for your wisdom among the set  
views spinning off opaque surfaces?

I've read the words - letting go, hollowing  
out, making room for Christ to be born

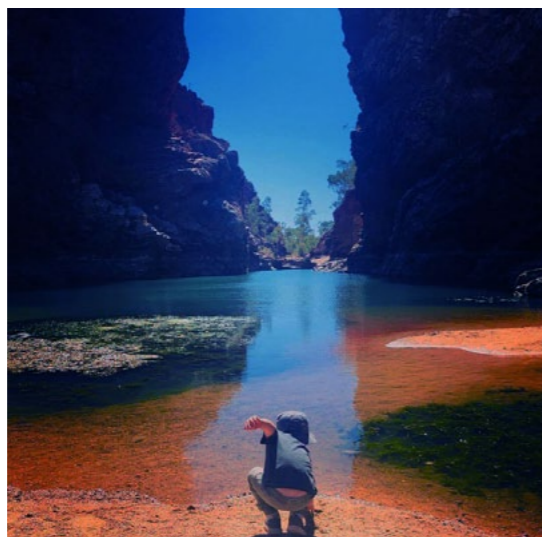
and sometimes  
I feel the small flame of Presence, flickering

spluttering within me, casting rays of light across the gaps  
revealing pathways

but mostly  
there's no Alleluias or Songs of Praise

just a nod between us in the chaos, that says  
I know you're there

Margaret Clifford



# Love Tenderly...

*Narelle speaks to us in this the second of the responses to Micah 6 to 'Act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly with your God'. which were the homilies of Advent. The homilies were based on the call. This is what she said:*

I feel so unqualified for this topic and perhaps that is a good thing because who of us really ever feels qualified to be an expert in loving? The one thing I know is that love can have many faces and is not just a fluffy, emotional, light headed feeling... Sometimes love is hard and extremely painful.

On my birthday recently, I received a card from our twelve year old Grandson with whom we have journeyed closely over the past ten years. He, probably like most 12 year old boys, is not one given to articulating emotion. The card from this 12 year old boy was for me like a jolt "out of the blue"....

"Dear Nana. Thank you for loving me and caring for me...." and I knew then that this was a very tender moment in my journey of loving and being loved....for this journey has certainly not been a romantic idea of what loving is....at times it has been really tough, for both of us even in the seemingly little things like getting to school on time...going to bed at a decent hour...picking up clothes off the floor.....and yet in his eyes maybe this was all understood as my loving him...as much as the times when he was little and I would tenderly sing him to sleep...all a demonstration of what is so true – that our care for someone is actually loving in action....Dear Nana... Thank you for loving me and caring for me....

Alain de Botton, the founder of the School of Life says...

We must fiercely resist the idea that true love must mean conflict-free love, that the course of true love is smooth. It's not. The course of true love is rocky and bumpy at the best of times. That's the best we can manage as the creatures we are. It's no fault of mine or no fault of yours; it's to do with being human. And the more tender we can be towards our flawed humanity, the better chance we'll have of doing the true hard work of love. It's about that sense of compassion, a sense of tenderness for ourselves as well.

Another way of looking at love is connection. All the time, we are hardwired to seek connections with others. And that is what love truly is. Not the often superficial and shallow connection on Facebook, where I may receive a friend request from someone Facebook thinks should be my friend....Love is honest connection – meaningful connection – no pretence, valuing each other as we are, in honesty....and even in such loving relationships, we can cultivate a tender attitude in our minds and hearts. It does take practice though through our own awareness and paying attention to what is going on in here and here.



Joanna Macey inspired by Rilke's poetry talks about death...

*The great secret of death, and perhaps its deepest connection with us, is this: in taking from us a being we have loved and venerated, death does not wound us without, at the same time, lifting us toward a more perfect understanding of the one we mourn... and of ourselves... And such reflection can be peaceful and tender in a loving way as we cherish the memories.*

De Botton has further insights - *When you ask someone to marry you, for example, you're asking someone to be your chauffeur, co-host, sexual partner, co-parent, fellow accountant, mop the kitchen floor together, etc., etc.* And on and on the list goes. No wonder that we fail at some of the tasks and get irate with one another. It's a burden. And I think the older I get, sometimes I think one of the nicest things I can do for someone I really love is leave them alone. Just let them go. Let them be. Don't impose myself on them because I'm challenging! Open up to a tender freedom, not control in the love relationship.

Have you ever thought of the words referring to love in our weekly SMX virtual liturgies... Each week we sing *"To love more truly this is my goal, to care more deeply with all my soul,* How well this captures the very essence of loving tenderly... and I also think the meaningful way our beautiful music and singing are shared comes across as an act of tender love....

There are other words in our liturgy that could easily become automatic if we don't pay attention:

*Creative Spirit, in love you have formed the universe....*

*To You, each of us is ....a companion on this journey of love....*

*On the night before he died,, Jesus came to table with those he loved....*

*(We give the Sign of Peace) to remember the call of the Christian message to live a life of unconditional love...*

It has made me think that we may not always be conscious of the tenderness of love as we love, but in the reflection on that love, the tenderness can be experienced. Our reflective liturgies can help to bring to life our memories of loving tenderly.

And Advent is about waiting. Love is like Advent – t may not be possible to make love happen as we so often expect.

## Walk Humbly With Your God

*Liz and Narelle have written on the first two of Micah’s trio of instructions in Micah 6. Here Margaret is reflecting on the third ‘Walk Humbly With Your God’.*

I’m going to begin by considering what each word means separately and then explain what I believe this requirement means for us.

The word **Walk** is rich in meaning. I’m sure the Prophet Micah deliberately chose the metaphor of walking because it was central to all aspects of daily life in his time and it also captures the concept of closeness. Walking is not passive. It’s an action. It’s about changing, evolving and moving towards something new.

To walk with another implies a sense of mutuality, of being fully present and listening to the other. It includes loyalty and a commitment to be with someone through the joys and difficulties of life. To walk with another is a privilege, a holy action and something to be treasured in life.

The word, **Humbly**, receives very bad press in our culture because it is not understood in its fullest meaning. It is commonly equated with a sense of unworthiness, low self-regard and even lack of strength.

However, Scriptures, particularly the Gospels, convey a very different understanding of humility. Jesus, who is considered the embodiment of humility, stands up against worldly powers and genuinely seeks to correct systemic injustice. His teachings, his interactions with others and his symbolic actions, such as the washing of the feet, present a radical strength.

We may receive pain instead... Like the young girl Mary in the story waiting and pondering in her heart, we too have to be willing to wait upon the birth of love in our lives not just at Christmas but over and over again.. Loving moments are graced moments for which we may have to wait with open and attentive hearts. After all, this twelve year old Grandson’s message was so unexpected, it caught me by surprise – this simple expression of tender love:

“Thank you Nana for loving me.....and caring for me”  
*Narelle Mullins*



Psychological literature also supports the concept of humility being a virtue of strength. In a paper on Humility, clinical psychologist, June Price Tangney says the key elements of true humility include:

- an accurate assessment of one’s abilities and achievements (not low self-esteem or self-deprecation)*
- an ability to acknowledge one’s mistakes, gaps in knowledge and limitations*
- an openness to new ideas and advice*
- a relatively low self-focus*
- and keeping one’s abilities and accomplishments in perspective (having an appreciation of the many different ways other people and all of creation contribute to our world)*

So humility is a very rich and multifaceted concept. One popular definition of this virtue is:  
*Humility is not thinking less of yourself; but thinking of yourself less!*  
It captures part of the meaning but true humility is much more. It is about relationships.  
The term psychological researchers use is “relational humility” which recognises that humility is not only intra-personal, an accurate view of one’s self, but also, interpersonal, how we relate to others. Humility entails having a sense of mutuality when interacting with others, practising deep listening and compassion and being open to learning from the other.

Obviously, acting humbly for self-promotion is not humility! So humility is also having integrity between one’s motivation, thought and behaviour. True humility is a freedom from consciousness of self.

Overcoming the ego requires hard work on our behalf. The account of the temptations of Jesus in the desert,(Luke 4:1-13) illustrates that it requires hard work and humility (even of Jesus) to overcome the ego instincts that choke out humility.

The preposition **With** is the pivotal word in today’s theme. Micah doesn’t say walk humbly for your God, or obey your God, he says walk humbly with your God. It implies accompanying God.

If we take seriously the phrase in John’s Gospel, *the Word became flesh and dwelt among us*, then Incarnation is not only about God becoming Jesus, but also about the outpouring of God in all creation.

The whole cosmos is incarnational. God is at the heart of all matter; is immersed in all things and all beings; is in all the joy and suffering of everyone and is with us creating something new as we move forward in conscious evolution.

Being with God is having an awareness of God in everything, in every one and every moment of our lives being an opportunity to encounter God and disclose God to others.

“Walking Humbly With” is a very challenging concept at the personal level and also at the political and organisational level where “power over” has been the dominant way of operating in western culture for many centuries and has become entrenched in much of our culture and structures.

Walking humbly with others, with the Earth and with all of its species would result in a very different world.

With is a small word with huge potential! Walking humbly with is the key to reaching across the gaps that separate us from

one another and the Earth and to building a more enlightened world of relationships and sustainability.

Moving to the final two words, **Your God**.  
The prophet Micah believed the people had broken the Covenant relationship they had with Yahweh and taken on other Gods, similar to the false Gods of today, the four P’s: power, possessions, prestige and popularity.  
It’s significant that Micah used the expression Your God. It is inclusive but also provocative! The question to ask is:

Who is my God? Or what is my God? What fills my mind or holds me hostage? What adjustments, or dramatic changes, do I need to make for the God of love to be at my core?

Like so many of you, my understanding of God has changed over the years. But whatever understanding we have of God, the challenge for us is to find a way to tap into this Divine Presence and become more conscious of being one with God, with others and our world.

In Luke’s Gospel. Mary provides an excellent example of walking humbly with your God. Through her humility and letting go and her openness to receive what is freely given, there was room for a new birth. The Christmas celebration highlights the challenge for us to make room for a new birth every day of our lives.

The Gospel is also a reminder of the broader understanding of Incarnation - as Sister Ilia Delio says

*All creation is the beloved Word of God. Every moment is a gift to wake up and love in a new way, to give birth to Christ.*

So I think the requirement to Walk Humbly With Your God is a poignant message. It is an invitation to become more conscious of God everywhere and in everything and to appreciate the holiness of walking with others in life.

It is an invitation to put aside our egos and set views, to be open to transformation and finding new ways of living and being in our world.

It is an invitation to be active in the thick of life wherever we are called, to heal relationships, build interactive communities and give birth to Christ.

Now is the time to break open our great potential to walk with others, with the Earth and with all of its species for that is where God is working with us to create wholeness and unity in love.

*Margaret Clifford*

# Sacred Wisdom

Source of all life, Sacred Wisdom,  
Prepare our hearts with wonder so we may  
meet  
with amazement all that lives and moves in  
the natural world.  
As we listen to silence in nature  
as we watch the path of a diligent ant  
as we admire the parent bird patiently  
teaching its young  
as we observe the moth perfectly  
camouflaged  
to fit in with the beauty of the bark on  
the tree  
may we be filled with awe, taking us out of  
ourselves,  
healing our fears and restoring our  
balance.  
Amen

*Ingerid Meagher*



# Listening and Treaty

Listening and treaty are linked deeply, I think, more than might first appear. Both draw on truth-telling and openness to others. Since the beginning of colonisation in this country, the First Peoples have been systematically denied recognition as human beings with sophisticated political, social and spiritual ways of life. And our shared history, which turns substantially on invasion and violence (direct and structural) has also been systematically denied. This denial is itself a form of violence, and the need to do away with it, and to fully recognise and listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is intense and pressing – listening both to the stories of trauma and also to First Peoples’ knowledge, insight and ways of doing and being. There is so much to learn.



The Uluru Statement from the Heart was a call by First Peoples to listen to them. The message of that statement is generally summarised as ‘Voice, Treaty, Truth’. That is:

- 1] that First Peoples be given a genuine voice to Parliament and more generally throughout the life of the country, in all the things that affect them;
- 2] that the truth of Australian history is made visible – the truth of invasion and colonisation, and of First Peoples’ ancient, living history and society;
- 3] that we come, as peoples, to some set of agreements that has real weight, that enables genuine, ongoing self-determination and truth-telling, and that enables us as peoples to see each other as different in various ways, but all equally human and deeply inter-connected.

This is a long, challenging journey rather than an arrival, but a journey that cannot be avoided without great cost. There is a chosen blindness at the heart of this country which does us all great damage. Underlying the Uluru Statement is the need to listen – to listen to First Peoples, and to listen to ourselves. Listening gives us a way of approaching this journey. It’s an orientation, a practice, a way of being in the world. I’ll come back to this.

To take first a couple of examples that might help think about Treaty:

The Uluru Statement talks about recognising Indigenous sovereignty or sovereignties. It also says that sovereignty is a

spiritual concept.

What do these things mean? Well, I don’t really know. But listening is about paying attention without judgement, without thinking something is not possible or not how we understand things to be. Listening is about seeking to understand, or if I don’t understand, it’s about acknowledging. A spiritual sovereignty and multiple co-existing sovereignties are things to be explored – to enter into, to travel. Listening is the way we can explore.

Sovereignty would include the ability to make decisions or participate meaningfully in decision-making about things that affect you and your communities. Although this kind of self-determination has been formal policy for years, it’s still very rare. Culturally, our society, whether through government, or corporations, or agencies, is still not prepared or not equipped to really listen to what First Peoples consider will work in their own communities and families. Our culture doesn’t make listening a priority.

A treaty might include many smaller compacts about how to arrive at genuine self-determination – in health, education or policing etc in particular regions. Many such compacts might be negotiated across the country between First Nations communities and local and state governments and other bodies. These might be held together in an overarching, national treaty, that reinforced local compacts with weight and teeth. Undertaking such steps requires taking the time and commitment to listen, to talk, to experiment, to go wrong, to do

# Stabilitas loci (remain in place)

it again. It's an orientation.

Recognising the legacy of the violence of our history also requires listening. But being aware of this violence is hard. I find it hard. I don't want to hear those things or even just read about them in the safety of my living room. There was a massacre not far from where I live. I don't want to read too much about that, although I will. It changes how I see these hills. Engagement with history is not only, or even mainly, this violence – but we have to recognise this violence. It has to come up in different ways and often enough (I don't know how much is enough) to enable healing – and it's going to come up.

People working on these issues sometimes say it's not about guilt on the part of the non-Indigenous population, it's about empathy – but you feel what you feel! This includes grief at the destruction and suffering imposed on First Peoples. Moreover, we non-Aboriginal people continue to benefit from invasion. So we can also feel a lot of confusion. These feelings are painful and will engender a lot of push-back – including in ourselves, let alone amongst those who see no need for this dialogue. We need to be aware of our own feelings – are we closing down, are we retreating into polarised, black / white views, are we just trying to protect ourselves? But perhaps in order to be able to be attentive to others, we need to be prepared to recognise and not try to escape our own pain. I don't mean overburden yourself here; just recognise what's happening for you without trying to escape it or dramatize it, so you might be able to return to the issue when you're not so distressed and maybe more able to hear.

Meanwhile the First Peoples we might be talking with, or even just see on a screen, are bearing heavy burdens of intergenerational and often personal trauma. There can indeed be much generosity and understanding, but there can also be a great deal of anger, rejection, withdrawal or a lack of trust so deep it makes exchange difficult. There is no reason for First Peoples to trust us, so when they don't, we shouldn't be shocked. It's part of this hurt that we're in. Listening is the only way I can think of to help with this.

I'm drawing from our own traditions around listening here, but First Peoples have very significant traditions of listening that we could learn from. The Senior Australian of the Year, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr, talked about listening in her own country around the Daly River. The word for listening there is Dadirri, which means inner deep listening and quiet still awareness. Miriam-Rose says, to know me, is to breathe with me.

Listening doesn't claim all the space. It's a foundational recognition that 1] there are others here, who have things to say or to be, and 2] that we are relating – that listening is an

act of relating or a recognition of relationship. This includes not only human others; there's a whole world of life that we can pay attention to and that we're part of. We don't have to have the answers and we can't have them in any final sense – we're not the only ones here. We're only part of this ongoing conversation, with each other, with the world, human and non-human, with the parts of us. It's okay if we can only do so much, because others are also doing things.

Listening in this sense is a quiet space of paying attention to the expanding world. This is linked to compassion and in that way it's part of the theme of Lent. Lent tells a story about invasion, violent occupation, betrayal, the destruction of that which is most precious. It's a recognition of suffering that invites us to see ourselves in the different dynamics causing that suffering and experiencing it. There are many resonances with the modern history of this country. But Lent is a meditation on compassion – for others and for ourselves. Compassion isn't about absolution; it helps us to see more clearly. It's about recognising what has been done and taking steps to undo those burdens of harm.

Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr says that we listen to the world – to the water, the emerging signs of a new season, to breath – and the world listens to us. This is a powerful point about experiencing relationship – that we live in an ongoing web of relationship, interaction, inter-being. This reminds me of a Biblical point – that we love God because, or as, God loves us into being; that we are continuously created by and part of a dynamic exchange. It's the sense of being part of a spacious mutuality that is so powerful here. Listening in this way is not something our culture has cultivated or prioritised. We are taught by public life to resist anything that might make us vulnerable. Sometimes we're afraid we'll be overwhelmed and won't know how to respond. But listening in this way shows us how we might be at home in life, and helps us build the courage and self-acceptance to move ahead with listening to and making justice with First Peoples. The long messy journey of healing our shared country relies on it. And perhaps we would all learn more about trusting the expansive consciousness that holds us, of which we are part.

*Anne Brown*

*Homily – Lent 2021. 13/14 March. Listening & treaty.*

Draw a line around  
your small space  
where ever you are  
make a vow  
not to step outside

Gently tame your greedy mind  
till it accepts  
there are no easy exits  
or windows to stare through  
at other people's lives

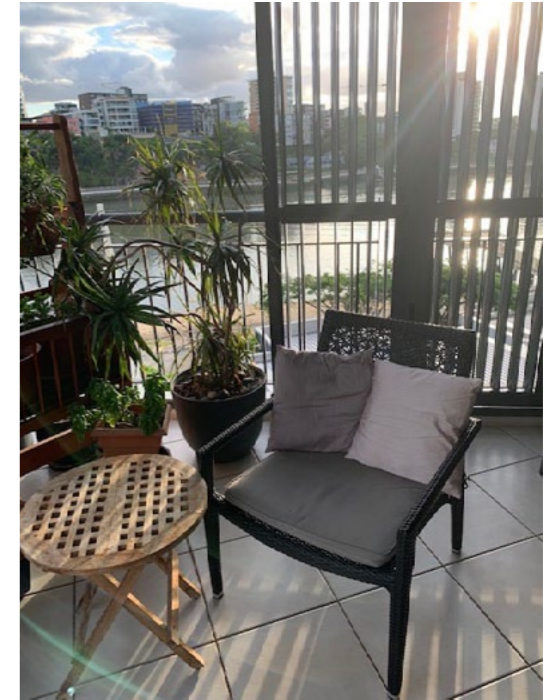
There is just this -  
this small place

As you sit beneath the Bodhi tree  
invite stillness to join you

Feel the sacred space  
within  
nurture it  
let it grow and expand  
surrender as it pushes aside  
the bollards you've erected  
let it stretch you  
to the edge  
of the universe

Then, open your doors  
let all of life flow in

Welcome it to your place



*Margaret Clifford*

*(After reading Richard Rohr's Weekly Summary 20/12/2020)*

# Martha of Bethany (Homily delivered by Liz Little on 23rd August, 2020)

Martha of Bethany is a Gospel character who often gets quite bad press because of Luke's story of Jesus' visit to her home. Her sister, Mary, sat at Jesus' feet and listened to him. Martha is known for being the woman who complained to Jesus when her sister didn't help her prepare the meal. Thus, Martha has become a negative character who is too occupied with busy-ness to fully appreciate the occasion.

In John's Gospel, Jesus visits Martha's family home. Her brother, Lazarus, is ill. He dies before Jesus arrives, but Jesus restores him to life. In another visit in John's Gospel, Martha's sister Mary washes Jesus' feet, dries them with her hair and applies expensive perfume to them. (John 12; 1-3) Pope Gregory the Great transformed Mary of Bethany in this story, into Mary Magdalene, some six centuries later, because he wanted to present Mary Magdalene as a prostitute, rather than a disciple.

The scripture scholars surmise that Martha and her siblings may have been well- off, able to host Jesus and his followers for meals. Mary was able to afford expensive perfume. <sup>2</sup> The scholars also believe that Martha was one of the wealthy women, financially supporting Jesus' ministry, referred to but not named in Luke's Gospel (Luke 8:3)<sup>1</sup>

We can also learn about the Bethany family by looking at what the early church taught about them. In early Christian writings and in art, both Martha and Mary of Bethany are portrayed at the cross and at the empty tomb. They were the original apostles to the apostles. Only later was that title given to Mary Magdalene.<sup>3</sup>

The Gospels tell us that Martha of Bethany was a special friend of Jesus. In John's story of Lazarus' death and in Luke's story of Martha complaining about her sister, it is Martha who goes out to meet Jesus as he approaches. So, against the conventions of the day, Martha, a woman, was able to welcome Jesus, a rabbi, into her home. (John 11:20) The writer of John's Gospel also has Martha specifically naming Jesus as the Messiah.(John 11:27), once again, an uncharacteristic thing for a female of the time to be doing.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps she wasn't just about domestic duties after all.

So the scholars see Martha as financially and socially independent, well informed, confident and of some standing in the eyes of Jesus and in the eyes of the Gospel writers. Surely a wealthy woman in Martha's position would have had servants to prepare the meals and serve her guests.

But the scholars point out that the gospel writer didn't put Martha in the kitchen; our culture has put her there. What the



Gospel actually says is that: Martha was distracted by her many tasks; (Luke 10:40)<sup>1</sup> It doesn't say that the tasks were kitchen duties.

Our culture has her preparing a meal because John's story in which Mary washes Jesus' feet, says that Martha served. The actual Greek word used is diaconia, from which we get our word deacon. In the first century it was used to describe the service of leadership in church, not the serving of food.<sup>1</sup>

Some scholars suggest that Martha wasn't serving food but serving Jesus' ministry – planning and organizing as well as financing. So, according to the scholars, Martha was doing good work, active in the ministry of Jesus. (That is certainly not to denigrate cooking or serving food. It is just in the interests of accuracy and for what we can learn from the story.)

Kevin Treston sees the Martha and Mary story as a metaphor for the two important aspects of the church. He sees Martha as the practical part of the church and Mary as the mystical side.

The active (Martha) part of church has established hospitals to care for the sick, schools to educate children and organizations to support the disadvantaged.

Mary is the mystical side, the human quest for an experience of the sacred, for the experience of oneness with the universe; the experience of whatever it is that we name as God. The experience can come from contemplation, prayer, reflection, liturgy, singing and many other things.

The experience of the sacred is important to us as human beings. It enables us to encounter a peace and an understanding that our rational faculties can never grasp.<sup>4</sup> It enables us to become more fully human, more whole. It gives us the energy and the direction to do our bit to bring about the Kingdom of God by making this world a better place.

In the Gospel story, Mary recognized the chance to sit and listen and to be. That is why, at that point, she had chosen the better way. But Jesus also valued Martha and her work in his ministry. That's why the Gospel writers have her, a woman, going out to greet Jesus and also have her understanding his mission so well.

For all of us, there are times when action is needed and there are times when sitting and listening and reflecting are needed. Sometimes practical action is the better path and sometimes just being with the sacred is the better path. We need balance. We need to be both Martha and Mary.

The Benedictine monks have a motto that translates as pray and work. It is a call to be a synthesis of both Martha and Mary. Sister Lillian Harrington was a Benedictine. She said that people who are all about action might never find God and

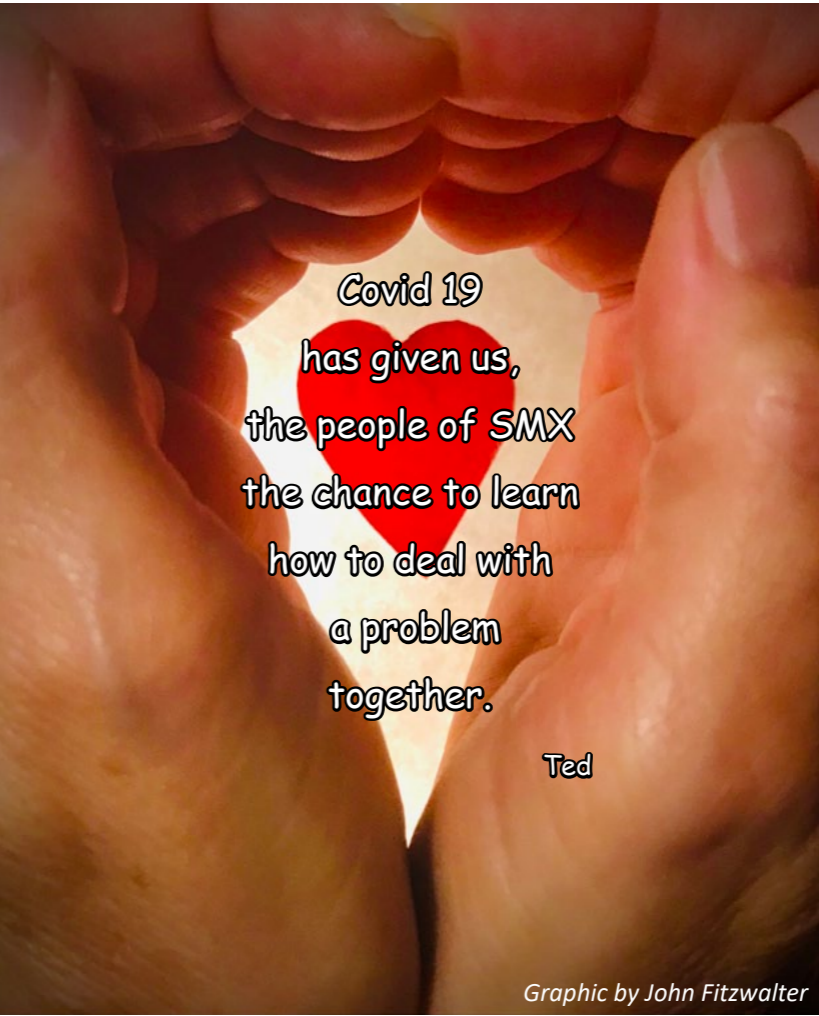
those who are only interested in contemplation might never build the Kingdom of God.<sup>5</sup>

We need both. We need to be both Martha and Mary.

*Homily delivered by Liz Little on 23rd August, 2020)*

*Footnotes:*

1. <https://pastordawn.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/martha-distracted-by-many-things.pdf>
2. <http://www.womeninthebible.net/women-bible-old-new-testaments/martha-mary/>
3. <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/people/main-articles/mary-and-martha>
4. <https://bigthink.com/the-evolution-of-enlightenment/why-mysticism-matters>
5. <http://www.monasteriesoftheheart.org/chapter-2-listening>



# Live with Light



Thinking only with absolutes like good vs evil, left-wing and right-wing, right and wrong, and black and white, leave little room for perspective and depth. What about light, shade and the richness of the whole spectrum of vibrant colour? This can all be revealed in light and darkness.

With light and darkness there is always a shadow side. We all have darkness, it's natural. Our shadows influence everything in the environment around us. We are all interconnected.

Darkness is not to be feared. Darkness is a time for rest, for sleep, for quiet, for hibernation and for healing. There is a time for darkness. Nothing can live forever in daylight. Surrender to it.

For those of us who suffer through a dark night of the soul, who live with loss, when everything seems dark, focus on any remaining light, any glimmer of hope, anything you still have and still can do. Be genuine, you don't need to make something up. You always have and can do something. Even one candle of light, of hope, is enough to get you through the night, until a new day dawns and you no longer live in darkness. Then the cycle will turn again, and darkness will return, but you will know you can live through it and have strength to go on. Storms may come and go, and there will be natural disasters, but they pass.

We need darkness to appreciate the light. Light does not shine bright in daylight. It's only in the darkness we can see the stars. No amount of darkness can overcome the light of a single candle flame.

Darkness is real. Darkness exists. Denying it, avoiding it, ignoring it, and only focusing on happy thoughts, does not make it go away. It does not enlighten it, instead it festers.

Father Richard Rohr from the Center for Action and Contemplation says “pain that is not transformed, is transmitted”. Shine light on your darkness. Use light to transform your pain and use it to empower rather than transmit your pain and use it to excuse hate. If you acknowledge darkness, accept it, give time to it, and express it, you can enlighten and transform it. You can live with and despite pain and choose to focus on what you can do and what you have.

My friend Rev Simon Ruth De Voil suggests we don't pray to end all darkness. If you pray, he invites us to pray for strength, for peace, for hope to endure it, knowing daylight will come again. Then look to the world and focus on the love, light, compassion, connection, beauty, awe, wonder and joy that is there to get us through the darkness. Even with darkness, life can be fulfilling.

Shiloh Moore

# Covid and Communication

When the question was raised last year as to what was sustaining one during the challenging times of Covid19, my own thoughts turned to communication. Communication as in emails, and letters as the correspondence of other people.

I have always been interested in letter-writing as a form of communication and also as a record of a life and time. This interest has its origins in an assignment I was required to do at high school, maybe in my third year. I found that I really enjoyed reading the collected letters of great people of the past. This has continued over the years and I am currently “dipping into” the letters of Barbara Blackman, former wife of the renowned Australian artist Charles Blackman, and “Ian Fairweather A Life in Letters”, letters from the artist who lived on Bribie Island for many years and who we would at times see when our family stayed at our house there back in the 60s and 70s. This interest in other people's correspondence continues today as I currently receive copies of letters received by my deceased younger sister over many years. They were recently found by her daughter and forwarded to me to collate. Most of these letters were written to my sister by our mother, an avid letter writer who each week would write a newsy letter to her three daughters in triplicate – using two

## A Reflection

Howard Thurman. Meister Eckhart

Howard Thurman is known as the spiritual genius behind the civil rights movement. His book, Jesus and the Disinherited, deeply influenced MLK, Jr Thurman talks about the “inwardness of religion” and the “outwardness of religion.”

For Thurman, the imagination in humans is in fact the Image of God in us, “and those unto whom it is given shall see God.” To follow our religious imagination is to “operate from a new centre,” one that is derived from our experience of the Divine.

He puts this explicitly when he says...*the place where the imagination shows its greatest powers as the angelos, the messenger of God, is in the miracle which it creates when one man, standing in his place, is able, while remaining there, to put himself in another man's place. To send his imagination forth to establish a beachhead in another man's spirit, and from that vantage point so to blend with the other's landscape that what he sees and feels is authentic—this is the great adventure in human relations.*

sheets of carbon paper of course. Other letters are from aunts and a grandmother. I am finding them very interesting as they are not only a record of family events, but my own family features from time to time.

During the months of the past difficult year, emails assumed an important role as a means of communicating and I have been greatly sustained by emails from two old friends. Back in 1940, three little girls started school together in Christchurch. Together they progressed through primary school and then right through high school, always in the same class. Post school years saw them separate, Margaret to Sydney, Annette to Western Australia and me to Queensland. We have remained good friends, and hardly a day goes by without an email to share. There have been times too when we have been able to meet, but the email is what has kept us together of late. The sharing of memories as well as mutual support are very important to us at this time in life. We are very fortunate to have been able to maintain this link. Eighty years of friendship: we are now 85 years old and still the best of friends.

Jan Murray



Here Thurman is defining beautifully the truth of compassion. And here lies salvation, for “to be to another human being what is needed at the time that the need is most urgent and most acutely felt, this is to participate in the precise act of redemption.”

The prophet works from imagination. That is why art as meditation is called “the way of the prophets.” Moral imagination sees beyond the boundaries of a particular time and social structure to see alternatives. The civil rights movement saw beyond segregation and Jim Crow—but it also developed a strategy (non- violent civil disobedience) to make that beyond happen.



Just as Howard Thurman was fully engaged in the struggle for justice and civil rights in his day, so was Meister Eckhart in his. He strongly supported the women’s movement (the Beguines) and the peasant movement of his day. “Beguines from the city of Goes [Holland] at the church.” Painting by Cecil Jay. Wikimedia Commons This did not sit well with the powers that be in church and society and contributed to his condemnation which occurred a week after he died following a trial in the papal headquarters of Avignon (the same pope who condemned the Beguines seventeen times also condemned Eckhart).

Eckhart declares that justice lies at the heart of spirituality, “the person who understands what I say about justice and the just person understands everything I have to say.” He, like Jesus and the Buddha, calls us to compassion, and declares: “compassion is the same as justice.”

Eckhart did not pursue spirituality from an armchair or a safe and comfortable position of tenure in an academic ivory tower. He spoke in the language of the oppressed (German peasant dialect) and abandoned academia in Paris to work among the people in Germany.

*Contributed by Ingerid Meagher  
From Richard Rhor meditation*

# The Updated Eight Points of Progressive Christianity

*Note: Progressive Christianity is inherently always evolving and progressing. Please take these lightly but seriously. They are not dogma, they are simply a starting point to establish conversations and a foundation of values and beliefs that we have observed Progressive Christians generally share. It’s ok if you don’t agree with all the words or all the parts. We support your authentic path. You can use these in your faith communities and with family and friends to talk about what it means to you to be a Progressive Christian in today’s world. Here’s to always progressing!*

By calling ourselves progressive Christians, we mean we are Christians who...

1. Believe that following the path of the teacher Jesus can lead to healing and wholeness, a mystical connection to “God,” as well as an awareness and experience of not only the Sacred, but the Oneness and Unity of all life;
2. Affirm that the teachings of Jesus provide but one of many ways to experience “God,” the Sacredness, Oneness and Unity of life, and that we can draw from diverse sources of wisdom, including Earth, in our spiritual journey;
3. Seek and create community that is inclusive of ALL people, including but not limited to:  
Conventional Christians and questioning skeptics,  
Believers and agnostics,  
Those of all races, cultures, and nationalities

Those of all sexual orientations and all gender identities,  
Those of all classes and abilities,  
Those historically marginalized,  
All creatures and plant life;

4. Know that the way we behave towards one another and Earth is the fullest expression of what we believe, therefore we vow to walk as Jesus might have walked in this world with radical compassion, inclusion, and bravery to confront and positively change the injustices we experience as well as those we see others experiencing;

5. Find grace in the search for understanding and believe there is more value in questioning with an open mind and open heart, than in absolutes or dogma;

6. Work toward peace and justice among all people and all life on Earth;

7. Protect and restore the integrity of our Earth and all of Creation;

8. Commit to a path of life-long learning, compassion, and selfless love on this journey toward a personally authentic and meaningful faith.

*[from ProgressiveChristianity.com 2020, co-created with Progressive Christian pastors, theologians, scholars and visionaries]*

# Coochie Mudlo Retreat



*Jeff placing Buddah and photo, memorial to Wash, in Heather and David’s garden.*



*Nicola, Lorella and Mark sharing a meal*



*Candles for Jeff’s birthday*



*Beautiful Coochie sunrise captured by Adi*

# At Home with Oneself

Strangely and interestingly, one of the great challenges of a life is to learn to be alone peaceably, at home in oneself. And now we have all at once, by way of a virus, been sent inside physically and emotionally, even if we're not home on our own. We're forced, at best, to work out the difference between isolation and loneliness or an ease within the aloneness inside ourselves: solitude.

In this essay, I draw on the work of Stephen Batchelor whose life went from Monasticism to marriage and who has recently published a book "The Art of Solitude." When it comes to Solitude, learning to be in solitude is a life-long process.

Recently. On Anh's Brush with Fame, Father Bob Maguire shared that when shafted from his Parish of South Melbourne after 38 years he felt real loneliness...and what did he do? In his words, "I journeyed into the centre of myself."

According to Stephen Batchelor, solitude is the feeling of being aware, at home and grounded within – free from impulses – an inward freedom to let go of overwhelming thoughts and emotions. It is the art of being alone within oneself and I was reminded in this interview that if we don't teach our children how to be alone, we are teaching them to be lonely. If only we would educate our children from a young age to become conscious of their interiority, their solitude, their aloneness, and to give them tools and practices — and nowadays, in some schools, they actually do, introducing mindfulness...

Batchelor sees himself as being a student of the early Philosopher Montaigne and of the Buddha. Montaigne and the Buddha both pointed out, there's all of these fantasies and paranoid thoughts and deep emotions and fears that are constantly crowding out; they're taking over — it's very difficult to be inwardly still. Anyone who's tried meditation knows this.

In our society we have strong egos; we're responsible, but actually, when I stop and look at what's actually going on inside me, that whole notion of being the CEO of my mind begins to disintegrate very fast. Montaigne's experience was of going into a little tower to spend time in solitude and having all hell break loose. He said, "My mind was like galloping horses over which I had no control." It threw him into a depression.

And the way he got out of that depression was by carefully analyzing what was actually going on in his thoughts and feelings and emotions. At St Mary's we have heard it put in many different ways, 'paying attention', 'mindfulness,' or we sing, 'Let it go ... let it all unravel.'

Batchelor calls our practice of solitude one of ethical intelligence. When we practise mindfulness, we feel that we

recognize that we're confronted with a choice: a choice to go along with the fantasy that's about to burst out, or not to — that's an ethical choice — and actually saying, "It's better to not get caught up in that story; I'm preferring to choose to be still and to let that go." Hence, solitude provides the frame for an inner ethic.

He talks about outer solitude and inner solitude. Outer solitude is when I go off to the top of a mountain, and I sit in a cave and basically, my mind is a complete chaotic mess, but I am physically in solitude in body only.

Solitude and cultivating solitude are basically learning how to be less reactive. And that's where emotional intelligence comes in.

Emotional intelligence is an intelligence that seeks to respond to the situation from a nonreactive space. And that nonreactive space is solitude/nirvana. Nirvana, as the Buddha defined it, is simply the absence of greed, absence of dislike, and absence of egoism. In other words it's a solitude in which we're not being crowded out by our attachments and our fears and our egoistic confusions. That's what we're solitary from. We empty our minds of our greed and our hatred and our attachment; we don't empty our minds of generosity and love and wisdom. We have to differentiate, in solitude, what it is that we are letting go of and what it is we are allowing the space for.

If we forgive, we're actually letting go of something. We're letting go of a grudge or a resentment. And in releasing that, we are freeing ourselves to think and feel and act and live differently. And that's the case with solitude: we empty ourselves of these things that are getting in our way, and that gives us the foundation for living differently — in other words, making different choices, leading an ethical life from a different perspective, deep down within ourselves.

Montaigne (1533 – 1613) , too, spent six months in quarantine and perilously fleeing the plague. He writes, "Montaigne's practice of solitude did not lead him to ignore the plague and rest in a state of aloof indifference...At the heart of solitude lies a paradox: look long and hard enough at yourself in isolation and suddenly you will see the rest of humanity staring back."

May we all find moments to pay attention to what is within, analyse what is going on, let go of attachments and make way for ethical choices that breed compassion for the rest of humanity staring back.

*Narelle Mullins*

# Exile

An inconspicuous structure  
just an ordinary inner City building  
No character no beauty no architecture that might arise feeling  
They'd been exiled to the second floor  
didn't even claim a view  
No paraphernalia no Altar  
only simple chairs no sign of a pew  
Each Soul as they arrived appeared at ease to be allowed there  
They were warm friendly and gentle they had no cross to bear  
No anger no remorse no feeling of loss within that barren exile  
Hope love and joy filled that space as each of them would smile  
I'd gone without expectation  
there would be nothing there for me  
Left with love in my heart realising just how my life should be  
An inconspicuous structure  
just an ordinary inner City building  
But each Sunday its second floor filled the World with meaning

*David Melville  
28th February 2021*



# A Stranger has Entered our Journey



During our last Easter season, we reflected on the Emmaus journey as told in the Gospel of Luke. It is the story of “the stranger” who greets the two disciples on their journey to Emmaus.

This sacred story helps me understand what is happening to us as a human community within the whole Earth Community. A powerful “stranger”, totally unexpected, has entered our midst on our individual and communal journeys these past few months.

I am a Christian Brother, a member of a world-wide religious Congregation and every 6 years a group of us gather somewhere in the world to review the previous six years of our life and ministry around the globe, and to dream a new chapter for the future

So at the end of February 2020, I set off for the Congregation Chapter which was being held in Lima, Peru for the first time, bright eyed and bushy tailed, having put in place all my plans for travel to and from Lima and to visit my sister in Washington DC for a couple of weeks, only to have them dashed in mid-March by the virus. As the Psalmist says: *On that day all their plans come to nothing! Ps. 146.4.*

Fifty-three brothers plus a French facilitator gathered in Lima. We were Australians, Peruvians, Irish, African, North American, Indian, New Zealanders, Canadian and English. Our plan was to reflect and discern for 4 weeks. A very important task during each Chapter is to elect a new World Leadership Team that will lead us for the next six years.

However, unbeknown to us, a powerful stranger entered our midst on Friday March 13th, in the guise of a pandemic. Peru’s government announced that it would be closing all borders and flights to and from Europe and Asia as of Monday 16th . We were taken by surprise, troubled, anxious, downcast, just like those early disciples walking the road. We were left discussing among ourselves what we should do,

trying to understand the implications of such a decision. We had a window of opportunity, two days, in which to respond. It was as if the Spirit was saying to us as we read in the Book of Deuteronomy: Brothers, I put before you Life and Death... choose Life! What is the “Life” decision we should take? But we hadn’t finished our reflections, we had not written a new chapter for our Congregation, and we had not elected our new Leaders!

Finally with much angst, it was decided that the road to life for us at this time was to stop our proceedings and to get moving as quickly as possible before everyone was trapped. The Chapter was suspended and we began to scatter to our homes! Somewhat like after Jesus died, the disciples scattered far and wide to seek shelter and security in their various homes to wait

On the world stage, a “stranger” called COVID 19 had joined us on the road and we were not prepared for it.

This stranger looked us in the eye and said:

“Why can’t I invade your species? For many years now you have ignored the messages from Mother Earth, from your scientists and your prophets to care for Earth and her living systems and habitats, her life forms and resources. You have had so many messages in bushfires, floods, dust storms, refugees fleeing troubled human spots, deforestation, fish kills, death of rivers, oil spills and the list can go on. But none of these obviously affected you, the human species, strongly enough for you, to take any real positive action.

But now what a change in your attitudes! All stops are out to protect you from infection and death. The medical scientists are being believed without question. The remedial actions are being put into place without delay. Oh, if only your trees and rivers, your oceans and air, your soils and fish had had such immediate and dramatic actions to protect them from destruction.”

As we continue to live through this experience, what lessons are to be learnt “on the way”? Recently I engaged in an on-line retreat with the poet David Whyte. In his poem, *What to Remember When Waking*, he writes:

*You are not a troubled guest on this earth,  
you are not an accident amidst other accidents  
you were invited from another and greater night  
than the one from which you have just emerged.  
(What to Remember When Waking)*

We are certainly “troubled guests on earth” at this time of our lives. This virus has a message for us about “the things that have been happening” these last few years. It is our teacher. What is its gift to us? What are the lessons we are to learn?

Maybe we are being invited to a new world that is both frightening and glorious, fragile and beautiful, a world in stress, myself in stress, and to walk not alone, but with others who share our stress. We are in this together. Just possibly we are being invited to look at our world, at ourselves and our sisters and brothers, our trees and rivers, our oceans and soils, with new eyes and new appreciations and to take nothing for granted.

*amidst the noise, refuse to talk,  
even to yourself, and stay in this place  
until the current of the story  
is strong enough to float you out.*

And so,”*Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul... Why every hair on your head has been counted. So there is no need to be afraid; you are worth more than hundreds of sparrows.” Matthew 10.*

As Rumi says in his poem, The Guesthouse, we are to welcome and entertain those strangers that come knocking at our door whether it be “a joy, a depression, a crowd of sorrows, the dark thought, the shame” and dare I say, COVID 19. Rumi encourages to invite it in and “be grateful for whatever comes because( it) has been sent as a guide from beyond.”

David Whyte said to us about this time of the virus, “we have been sent to our rooms” to be alone, to be quiet, to stop.

So in this inner room of our own homes, our social distancing and isolation, we may be able to speak to our God of the new incarnations, the new habitations and the new revelations we are meant to live and hear. David went on to say that “we have been stopped in our conversations, the pause button has been pushed,” so Earth can rest from the humdrum of human society, because we as a human community can no longer

grow in the continuing conversations we have been having to date about how to live on this Earth, this “our Common Home”.

What new conversations do we need to have if we are to endure this with courage and insight and hope for the future? The old conversations are obviously not working anymore and not allowing us to grow. Are the answers for us in Earth, our Home, in her cries for Life, in our falling in love with Her once more? Can we truly say in the words of another of Whyte’s poems:

This is the bright home in which I live, this is where I ask my friends to come,

*This is where I want to love all the things it has taken me so long to learn to love.*

*(The House of Belonging, David Whyte)*  
In our first reading, Coleman’s Bed, we are invited to our inner rooms to reflect on who we really are at this time of pandemic and how we are being transformed both outwardly and inwardly by circumstances beyond our control.

*Find that far inward symmetry  
to all outward appearances, apprentice  
yourself to yourself, begin to welcome back  
all you sent away, be a new annunciation,  
make yourself a door through which  
to be hospitable, even to the stranger in you.  
See with every turning day,  
how each season makes a child  
of you again, wants you to become  
a seeker after rainfall and birdsong,  
watch now, how it weathers you  
to a testing in the tried and true,  
admonishes you with each falling leaf,  
to be courageous, to be something  
that has come through, to be the last thing  
you want to see before you leave the world.  
Above all, be alone with it all,  
a hiving off, a corner of silence*

In religious speak, such a gathering is called a Congregation Chapter. Interesting that word Chapter. Stories are often made up of chapters, even Earth’s story, which is now in a seemingly frightening chapter of its life.

*Tony Hempenstall*

# Ash Wednesday

Ash Wednesday  
All those days  
you felt like dust,  
like dirt,  
as if all you had to do  
was turn your face  
toward the wind  
and be scattered  
to the four corners  
or swept away  
by the smallest breath  
as insubstantial—  
did you not know  
what the Holy One  
can do with dust?  
This is the day  
we freely say  
we are scorched.  
This is the hour  
we are marked  
by what has made it  
through the burning.  
This is the moment  
we ask for the blessing  
that lives within  
the ancient ashes,

that makes its home  
inside the soil of  
this sacred earth.  
So let us be marked  
not for sorrow.  
And let us be marked  
not for shame.  
Let us be marked  
not for false humility  
or for thinking  
we are less  
than we are  
but for claiming  
what God can do  
within the dust,  
within the dirt,  
within the stuff  
of which the world  
is made  
and the stars that blaze  
in our bones  
and the galaxies that spiral  
inside the smudge  
we bear.

Jan Richardson

# The Fluid Mystery of God



Two of the things I have been giving time and energy to during the COVID-19 lockdown is the garden and the studio.

Expanding the garden, working with Maeve – the master gardener – in the vegetable garden. Digging, composting, planting and now harvesting.

In the studio, I have been preparing for an exhibition of work around climate change and the life of bees.

In both places and activities there is a connection to a gospel reading about the wheat and the weeds. Everything seems straight forward enough but after a while it is clear everything is not as it seems or what was planned.

What emerges in the garden and what emerges in the making of art never equates to what was imagined at the beginning.

There are weeds that look like spinach.

There are bugs that compete for the tomatoes.

There are moths that love the cabbages.

In the studio, the ideas in my imagination never make it onto the paper as first conceived. Concept is one thing, concretion is another.

The reading from Genesis tells the story of Jacob and his dream. Everything in this young man's life seems straightforward enough but then Jacob has a life changing moment of confusion. In the midst of life, something within life and bigger than life arrived and then faded – leaving a changed man.

The psalmist writes about being aware of being so immersed in the spirit of god that he has no idea of how to describe it or how to live in it. In the Romans reading Paul uses language a bit like the psalmist as he talks about the spirit in us. All very mystical.

We are often reminded that the spirit of god and our immersion in that spirit and comprehension of that spirit is, as with my garden and my art work, never as we expect it to be. God's spirit and our experience of god's spirit is a constant fluid mystery. It is in the embracing of that fluid mystery that we find hope and freedom.

If I don't set my heart to perfectly represent the first thought in my imagined artwork but work towards something like it and let the work itself lead me – if I trust the work itself to become what it really is under my hand then I find my creativity maturing.

In Thomas Merton's book : " New Seed of Contemplation" in the chapter "Humility against despair" Merton writes:

Pp 186, 187,188

*How many people there are in the world of today who have "lost their faith" along with the vain hopes and illusions of their childhood. What they call "faith" was just one among other illusions. They placed all their hope in a certain sense of spiritual peace, of comfort, of interior equilibrium, of self-respect. Then when they began to struggle with the real difficulties and burdens of mature life, when they became aware of their own weakness, they lost their peace, they let go of their precious self-respect, and it became impossible for them to comfort themselves, to reassure themselves, with the images and concepts that they found reassuring in childhood.*

Merton is describing my experience and many others of us who have found ourselves wondering what our faith in god is meant to do in the here and now.

As we have moved away from the naivety Merton talks about we find ourselves stumbling along but still determined to make something of this because we know there is something here.

It's a bit like trusting the garden to produce something and trusting the art work I am doing. When I cease to always control and worry about what the outcome will be and to work with and learn from the life in the plant and the soil and the life of the art work in the drawing itself I begin to be a different gardener, a different artist.

Merton says: *Place no hope in the feelings of assurance, in spiritual comfort. You may well have to get along without this. Place no hope in the inspirational preachers of Christian sunshine, who are able to pick you up and set you back on your feet and make you feel good for three or four days- until you fold up and collapse in despair."*

The Tree of Life

Self-confidence is a precious natural gift, a sign of health. But it is not the same thing as faith. Faith is much deeper, and it must be deep enough to subsist when we are weak, when we are sick, when our self-confidence is gone, when our self-respect is gone. I do not mean that faith only functions when we are otherwise in a state of collapse. But true faith must be able to go on even when everything else is taken away from us.

Being aware of and attentive to the reality of the fluid mystery of god is what faith is to me.

It is not belief in dogmas or theologies but an inner focus on the intangible that I really know is the spirit of god. It is difficult to put into words but it is not unlike trying to describe the art making process or the poetry writing process.

May we all in these challenging times find a new freedom in our daily renewed awareness of the presence and mystery of the spirit in all.

O Lord you have searched me and known me  
You know when I sit down and I rise up;  
You discern my thoughts from far away.  
You search my path and my lying down,  
And are acquainted with all my ways.  
Even before a word is on my tongue,  
O Lord, you know it completely.  
You hem me in, behind and before,  
And lay your hand upon me.  
Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;  
It is so high I cannot attain it.

“...God who searches the heart, knows what is the mind of the spirit.”

“...the spirit helps us in our weakness...”

Peter Breen

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 greening and glory  
The apple of the eye  
Being Tree of Life

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

Barbara Fingleton



St Mary's Matters  
Autumn 2021

Editor - Margaret Ortiz

Sub editors - Jan Murray

Printed by John Hallett

Finances - Doc Ortiz

Ingerid Meagher

Adi Strickland

Xavier Grafix

You are invited to contribute financially to the work of St Mary's Community in Exile by donating to: St Mary's Community Ltd, BSB 064 131 Account 10339414, Commonwealth Bank, West End.



Michelle Harris

I would like to acknowledge Michelle Harris. Art is her passion and she does it with love. Her art and her words inspired the above.

To see or purchase Michelle's work go to her website - [www.defyinggravity.com.au](http://www.defyinggravity.com.au)

# The Prayer of Jesus

Breath of our every fibre,  
Flowing in and beyond the stars,  
May we rejoice in your ever-renewing life.  
May your love flourish,  
May your peace be known,  
in all beings and becomings.  
Sustain us in what we need.  
Transform the suffering we inflict,  
as we transform the suffering we endure.  
Free us from all that crushes joy,  
and keep us from unbearable pain.  
Let your way be our journey,  
your truth our story,  
and your life our coming home,  
now and always, Amen.

Josephine McDonnell Inkpin  
(after Jesus)

