



**St Mary's in Exile**  
10 Year Anniversary

# **St. Mary's Matters**

*St. Mary's in Exile*

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## From the Editor

Normally there is a strict limit to the length of articles for this magazine, but on this special edition for our tenth anniversary the opening article is much longer than usual. It is a well written story of SMX and Micah Projects by Karyn Walsh.

It is important that we remember and celebrate the partnership that we have had with Micah throughout most of the history of St Mary's and particularly in the shared 'in

exile' time. The role that our commitment to Micah played in our decision to leave the old church is an important one.

There are several other pieces which tell of memories of our move and explain why this community plays a big part in our lives today.

Congratulations to everyone who helped us make it to our tenth anniversary. Well done!



*SMX people showing solidarity with refugees on Manus Island.*

# St Mary's – Ten years On

I still remember the day we were told that Micah Projects could stay in St Mary's House but we could not allow Peter Kennedy or Terry Fitzpatrick on site.

My immediate reply was "well that's against our vision and mission". We are about justice and not injustice, inclusion and not exclusion. And we got on with the process of moving out and staying collocated with St Mary's in Exile in West End Boundary Street. And it's been a great place to be.

Personally, it was a time of great sadness: leaving behind all that the church held together as both a building and a community.

It held so much of our history as many people grew up within the Catholic Church and we created new memories of what it meant to be a progressive and publicly welcoming faith community where difference and not sameness was celebrated and grappled with.

Guided by our passion for a more relevant, just and Inclusive church, the decision was made. We were without a building but with a community.

A new window opened for what is still today a community of people with a passion for being authentic and engaged in creating justice as well as responding to injustice. It opened us all to uncertainty.

For Micah Projects this was a challenge financially, but never have I felt we were moving away from the community. I have always felt, and still do, embedded in the principles and relationships the community gave to Micah: to act justly, love tenderly and walk humbly. Principles that can guide any person of faith. Or any person who believes in our common humanity, our power to create justice and respond to injustice.

Why I feel this is because it's all about people. A week would not go by in the routine of my work where I do not meet someone who knows me from St Mary's, or someone who has been associated with St Mary's past or present, both locally and across Australia.

We are a community who are not defined by our attendance at a liturgy or our connection with a building. We are defined by our connection to community, faith and social justice. And we accept the diverse ways that each person may engage in spiritual practices.

For me I cannot separate my spirituality and practices from my day to day life and work. Just like I can't separate Micah Projects and St Mary's community in our common vision. While we have separate legal structures, these are only a means to an end. They are not the end.

Our past 10 years have been filled with creating justice and responding to injustices. They have been filled with opportunities and challenges and the privilege that comes with collectively making a difference, while being grounded in a diverse community of support.

## Act justly

We have followed the principles of acting justly in responding to homelessness by advocating for homes with people who are homeless. We have seen the dream of supportive housing come to life through Brisbane Common Ground and expansive outreach, but missing the stop at St Mary's, 20 Merivale Street.



*Chef Phyllis assisting Brisbane Common Ground tenant Brendon, who is vision impaired, to prepare his dinner. Photography: Mark Crocker.*

Our funding has enabled us to expand our Street to Home outreach team to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and 365 days a year.

What started behind the desks at St Mary's House became our coordinated access team located in Peel Street at the Brisbane Homelessness Service Centre and now our Home for Good office in Boundary Street.

We have created cafés for pathways to employment to build community connection. Many of the community are regular visitors and supporters.

We are addressing health inequality in partnership with the Buddhist Compassion Relief Tzu Chi Foundation through our shared belief of compassion in action as a matter of faith. We are bringing together a wide range of health and wellness, dental and medical programs for mind, body and spirit for people on low incomes or sometimes no incomes.

## Love tenderly

So many in the community wanted us to respond to injustice in relationships, families, churches and institutions. Relationships that were meant to give love, exploited vulnerability. Abuse replaced love and respect. Relationships where religion was used to justify oppression.

The last 10 years has seen this response come to reality and grow.

We have supported women in their decisions, we have gathered resources to create new safe homes and we have witnessed the harm, the trauma and the loss of life of women and children from domestic and family violence. Your financial support has assisted women and children to make choices that they would not have had if the resources were not available.



*Carlos and Carla from the Street to Home team providing assertive outreach healthcare and support. Photography: Katie Bennett.*

The last 10 years has seen us developing new models of integrated responses for justice and protection for women experiencing domestic violence through a 24/7 service every day of the year.

Violence and abuse happens anywhere and everywhere intimacy, vulnerability and power coexist:

In intimate relationships, in professional relationships and out of home care.

In churches and faith communities, government run institutions and NGOs, as children and as adults.

Institutions entrusted with the care of children or vulnerable people abused their position and did more harm.

Many people who come to St Mary's for liturgy and connection over the years have experienced or witnessed domestic violence and/or violence or abuse by a trusted priest or employee in the church. It was those early meetings in the late 1990's where women spoke up about wanting to see violence against women within homes and within the Catholic Church addressed. From those voices

and those outside the church so much has happened in the past 10 years.

We are providing advocacy and support to thousands of people across Queensland who experienced abuse in institutional settings including the Catholic Church. Thousands of people have been heard, and have sought redress.

We actively called for and engaged with The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse over its 5 years. Lotus Place now has three locations in Brisbane, Rockhampton and Townsville.

Our work is local, state and national and we love our international partners. We may no longer be part of a global Catholic Church but we are definitely part of global efforts to create justice where there is injustice.

We continue to work with young pregnant and parenting women in Brisbane and Caboolture to enable them to access resources, enrolments and services to bring to life their aspirations as families, for themselves and their children. We have an approved childcare centre to care for children preschool age so that they do not have to be present at court, in counselling, or other processes where their parent is looking for a house, or having to recall a trauma. The children can instead enjoy a safe and playful time with experienced childcare staff.

We now provide services across the lifespan, from birth to death, to targeted populations so they can have a home, safety in relationships, have a quality of life to live and die with dignity, have places of connection with community and know they are supported when adversity and trauma make their mark. Without the community support and generosity that goes alongside our government grants, we would not be able to do that.

We advocate with parents to be recognised and heard in systems that have so much power over their choices and lives.

We remember that to love, we all need safety, to be loved, community support and others to believe in us. These are deeply held values of St Mary's in liturgy and in our work for social justice. We have an amazing workforce who make these values live each day in their work.

We cannot have justice in the community if we don't have it in our relationships, in family, workplaces, faith communities, no matter who we are or where we belong.

## Walk humbly

We know we can do very little alone. Our partners work in many places: government, churches, Commissions of Inquiry, elected members of Parliament, other non-government organisations, small businesses, corporations, in the home, schools and diverse workplaces.





*Official Opening of Wellspring Children and Families' Hub by Minister Di Farmer, August 2018. Photography: Katie Bennett.*

We partner with Indigenous communities and agencies at events like Close the Gap, Annual Sorry Day and NAIDOC week activities. We have a comprehensive Reconciliation Action Plan to ensure we provide integrated and culturally appropriate services.

We have been the backbone organisation for two important campaigns: 50 Lives 50 Homes and 500 Lives 500 Homes.

Collectively we housed hundreds of individuals, families and children over the past 10 years and with community support, we have been able to set up homes, including the 146 Units at Brisbane Common Ground.

Most importantly we are humbled by the courage and voices of those with whom we engage. It is their effort, insight and courage to overcome significant obstacles following adversity and trauma across their lifespan that is deeply moving. They accept us into their lives with gratitude and a hope that is not always fulfilled that things will improve.

We are proud to be giving those with lived experience a voice. And to support them to participate, advocate and contribute to change as parent advocates through Family Inclusion Network; survivors of childhood abuse through Lotus Place; peer workers at Young Mothers for Young Women (YMYW); people who have experienced homelessness through our Home for Good services; or women who experienced domestic violence through our Resound group.

### **Dare greatly**

St Mary's as a community dares greatly to live by the principles of acting justly, loving tenderly and walking humbly. The community has always supported Micah Projects to enact these principles as we create justice and respond to injustice.

I am a fan of Brené Brown and her work. In her book 'Daring Greatly' she shares a reflection from Theodore Roosevelt.

*It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.<sup>1</sup>*

I think we can hold with pride our attempts to enter the arena of both church and our society to both do and see the world differently – to see each other as our neighbour, especially the most vulnerable. St Mary's has, and is, full of people who dare to make a change in so many arenas. It is not an easy path. It comes with very real challenges to relationships, to beliefs, to practices. But what counts is that we are here continuing the vision that we started thirty years ago despite the challenges and obstacles.

Brené Brown reminds all of us that when we step into arenas:

*It's natural to stumble and fall when you put yourself out there. There is no shame in making mistakes. And, no matter how much it might feel like it is, failure is not the end of the world. The fact that you had the courage to show up and be vulnerable is far more indicative of your character than your failure could ever be.<sup>2</sup>*

While Theodore had such a great insight – it was his wife and partner Eleanor whose work continues to inspire us to lift our vision for a world where human rights are respected, valued and acted upon for all citizens.

*Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. ... Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Eleanor Roosevelt*

We look forward to the next 10 years of opportunity, success, and failures!

Karyn Walsh, CEO Micah Projects

### **Footnotes:**

1. Transcript from Theodore Roosevelt's speech 'Citizenship in a Republic' delivered at the Sorbonne in Paris, France on 23 April 1910. Quoted in: *Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead* Brené Brown, Avery, 2012
2. <https://blog.thefabulous.co/the-3-phases>

# What Were Our Hopes and Dreams When We Left St Mary's?



Gwenneth's late husband John is holding his banner in the old church just prior to our leaving.

We left the old Church, forced out in a brutal way, but proud and supportive of our leaders, Peter and Terry who had made a public stand against the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Some members left the community, some moved into exile, and there were many mixed feelings. We were buoyed by the thought of liberation, but very unsure as to what might evolve as our future community. So many memories of going into exile, the song we sang many times, composed by Robert Perrier:

*"Tenderly, justly  
Walk in the footholds of Love  
Unashamedly, gracefully,  
Be fearless, be worthy, be strong"*

I stayed with the community in exile which had been a place of healing and inclusion for me. I came from the Anglican tradition to St Mary's in the early 1990's, following a long and sometimes bitter struggle in a prophetic reform movement to have women ordained as priests in the Anglican Church of Australia. Even though this happened in 1992 I bore the scars of one who was traumatised and marginalised in the Anglican Church.

I wrote of "My hopes and dreams for St Mary's in Exile" in 2009. In the midst of so much uncertainty these were framed mostly in questions. But undergirding those questions there were several principles which I held dear. I hoped that we retained the qualities of the faith-filled community that we were at the old Church as the followers of Jesus Christ that we had always claimed to be.

I hoped that we would continue as a community that could incorporate people of other cultures, sexuality, beliefs, physical and mental abilities, and any other characteristics that we might define as different from ourselves.

Have these hopes been fulfilled? We have remained a community of warm and loving relationships and welcoming of others. The community was very supportive of me when my husband John died in 2016. We have maintained the strong social justice outreach which was always typical of our community. Environmental issues have continued to be an issue on our agenda.

I want to reflect on some of the other questions that I raised in 2009 and explore how they have been addressed in the 10 years of our exile.

Will women be included as leaders in the community? We have seen women homilists, Eucharistic presiders, and many other leadership roles in our community. This has been to the benefit of both sexes, and has been an encouragement to women whose gifts are often hidden in the institutional Church.

Will the Mass continue to be in the same format as we followed at St Mary's? As a reforming community we questioned much of the traditional doctrine and there followed many iterations of what form of liturgy we wanted. The debate continued on how much of our tradition was valuable to keep and what was better discarded. Often the community was divided on these issues e.g. replacement of the traditional Lord's Prayer and the Gospel reading in each Mass. Some observed that



we were looking “Protestant”. Our observance of the traditional Church calendar seems to have disappeared. However, we have finally settled on a liturgy which appears to satisfy the community and has addressed some of these issues.

Do we need to be looking in the near future to a more permanent place that will meet the needs of our community? Our benefactors, the Trades and Labour Council have generously given us use of the “upper room” on the second floor of the building. Whilst this has relieved financial pressures on us as a community, we miss the “passing traffic” such as the homeless and itinerant people who used to frequent the old St Mary’s building and its precincts. We are less visible to overseas or out-of-town visitors who may happen to find our building. The use of our website certainly keeps us visible as a national and international means of communication, but within certain limits.

Will our community be representative of the people we are? Will our priests seek a new model of priesthood? It remains for some people that we are still functioning as a community on a “clerical model”. Opinions are divided about this issue.

Will our community be representative of the people we are, in other words is our governance truly representative of the people in our community? My personal experience is that we need more transparency between the SMX Board, the Faith Council and the community. I recently requested both bodies to give acknowledgement and an expression of thanks to some members who had left the community recently, people who had made significant contributions to the community over a number of years. It was disappointing that both bodies declined to take this step. So while on the surface we appear to be functioning well as a community, I observe that we still have a way to go regarding transparency and communication to members.

These last observations may appear to be negative, but I believe we must be honest and realistic about our community as we journey towards the future. I repeat the prayer that I made in 2009.

I pray that the Spirit of God will guide each of us in our deliberations, that we will be able to support one another to maintain unity in diversity, as the body of Christ, and endeavour to show the light of Christ to this world.

*Gwenneth Roberts*



*Chef and Trainees at the Hope Street Cafe, South Brisbane.*

*Photography: Craig Holmes.*

# Ten Years of Journeying

Ten years of journeying for SMX – along a different path, but in a place where hospitality has been extended, welcomed and appreciated. Thank you TLC!

Yes, we no longer gather in a Church and some of us may continue to miss “our” church up the road, but perhaps in a greater sense now, we are Church as we rely on each other rather than a building.

In 2016, I wrote a letter to Archbishop Mark Coleridge ahead of his visit to our community:

*As a long time member of this special community, I cannot articulate the depth of gratitude for support that I feel I owe this community. I cannot imagine that I would have felt free to be as open and honest in any other Parish setting. I think this is how many feel. It does not matter what our flaws or circumstances are, St Mary's has remained faithful in its genuine inclusiveness and both Peter and Terry's service to the community has enriched our journeying.*

*I was in Canberra recently visiting my ageing father and for a day I hired a car and went to visit the Wagga Presentation Sisters' Community to which I belonged for twelve years. The Sisters told me that they longed for the richness of liturgy we experience at our St Mary's especially through the varied homily sharing that never ceases to challenge - and even disturb us from our comfort zone.*

*I wonder what the price would be if you actually came to our 9am Liturgy and even sat in the back row? Maybe you would be criticised, but you strike me as someone who could defend that in the name of reaching out and acceptance?*

*All I know is that it would warm the hearts of many in our SMX Community to have you share the liturgy with us. Please consider this as you would be warmly welcomed.*

The Archbishop has not come – to date anyway!

Is there a future for SMX? Who knows? Most are ageing and the young seem to find fulfilment elsewhere – many of them being a power of good for our world.

We could anguish about our future all the while hearing the importance of the “now” and “being in the moment.” No matter what is ahead for SMX, there will always be seeds of our “being Church” now and our caring and celebrating now that will transplant somewhere into the future.

So what it is about SMX that I value?



- authenticity
- genuine belonging
- inclusion of all
- challenge to act on injustice
- the sense of “looking outwards” to need
- inspiring and creative liturgy
- nurturing spirituality
- a sense of service.

SMX is really hard to describe. Words hardly seem to do justice to this spiritual “home!”

Thank you all!

Narelle Mullins



## Early Days

**W**e first started going to St Mary's as a family in October 1990 – myself, my husband Peter and our two very young daughters.

Peter and I were impressed by the homilies given by Peter Kennedy and later by Terry. The homilies focused on making the scriptures relevant to modern day lives. More than that, the focus was on social justice and that resonated with us. We felt at home. We saw social justice goals brought to fruition in a practical way when Micah was founded. I was also very admiring of the respectful way in which Peter and Terry treated homeless people who tended to congregate around the church.

My traditional catholic upbringing and my dutiful nature meant that I had acquired the standard view of God as some kind of Human-like Supreme Being who took a kindly interest in us but could also be rather scary. At the same time, though, I disagreed with the Church on many issues, particularly regarding contraception, abortion, sexual preference and so on.

Over the years at St Mary's however, my view of God was challenged. Gradually I came to accept inclusive language, words of wisdom that did not come solely from the bible but from other religions and in the writings of

philosophers, mystics, theologians and so on. I accepted homilies given by members of the community and by women. I began to understand that god existed in the hearts of people wherever one saw goodness, kindness, compassion.....I came to realise that to make the world a better place requires human action in this life; no use waiting around for god to fix things up in the next. As a result of that, I think I have become a better person.

And so, ten years ago when the Catholic Church decided they could not accommodate us or our beliefs, for me it was an easy decision to leave it and move to the TLC. I really didn't agonise over the decision. I never felt particularly sad or angry.

And yet, I still identify as catholic. I was raised a catholic and it is my tribe. My mother died in December and we gave her a traditional Requiem Funeral Mass as she would have wanted. I found I still felt pretty comfortable with the traditional liturgy because those rituals have formed who I am. Whilst still feeling catholic in the broad sense, it is very important to me that I belong to a particular community which has similar values and a worldview which matches my own.

*Maree Brown*

## Ten Years

At St Mary's we share our stories.

We celebrate our anniversary

We have good people.

Some have died.

We have Peter who is gentle with people.

We share our stories.

Share yours,

*Ted*



*Paul from the Micah Projects' Street to Home team interviewing people during the 500 Lives 500 Homes Registry Fortnight, April 2014. Photography: Patrick Hamilton*

## Committed to Acceptance

**S**t Mary's in Exile is the first Christian community that I have been connected to since I stopped attending Sunday school as a young child. I've read Christian mystical texts and some of the Bible, sat alone in churches and chapels and retreated in a couple of beautiful convents but the only communities I have felt akin to were the Buddhist groups I have been associated with over the years.

Shortly after arriving in Brisbane about five years ago, I joined the Plum Village sangha and, finding that many of the people in it were also part of SMX, including Terry, I thought I would go along to a service or two. I have been coming, on and off, ever since. I have warm friendships here and feel at home.

I come because I feel I can be myself here, there is no assumption that I will accord with any set of beliefs and I am free, like we all are, to follow my own path without judging another's. I think it is this deep commitment to acceptance that I most value. That, the nourishing structure of the worship and the influence of others' creativity and thoughts. It is a space in the week to communally embrace the big picture.

*Anne Ooms*



## Dine and Divine



"You eat in the church!?" was a common reaction from friends in other parishes.

**I**n the late 1980s and 1990s, a group of us met every Monday evening in St Mary's Church for a potluck dinner and discussion of spiritual issues. 'Dine and Divine' proved to be a precursor for our cluster groups.

Back then, it was an important get-together for soul-searching people. We shared a meal from 6 to 7pm, then discussed an issue or a book until 8pm. In many ways, it was a time of vibrant questioning in the Catholic Church. People wanted to work out what they thought and felt about many issues. Some of us had spent time in the Holy Land and we sought to deepen this experience through discussion of theology. It was simply good to be able to connect and to have real conversations about religious controversies and spiritual matters.

There's nothing like a regular, comfortable chat, a few laughs and some food to develop a sense of trust and knowing each other. Our SMX cluster groups have built on the Dine and Divine experience in mature and dynamic ways.

*Kathy Hedemann*



# Memories of Old St Mary's



Ten years have passed, but scenes of those halcyon days in the historical building still linger in our minds and hearts.

Our youngest daughter was baptised there by Peter even before he introduced the wording which had him reported by the temple police.

Happily Bec had no difficulty making her first communion in our local parish. But others later with certificates from St Mary's were refused by some PPs unless their ceremony was repeated using the official text. Interesting that some of the secondary schools in Brisbane today are offending readers of the Catholic Leader with their use of inclusive language in prayers.

The long overdue appreciation of women in a male dominated religion and their great contribution to the St Mary's liturgy is most memorable. Those refreshing homilies "from the trenches" began a tradition that continues to this day at TLC.

In my altar boys early years I knew that the PP had a particular list of sermon topics expected of him by the bishop for each Sunday whether it was a doctrinal matter like the role of the blessed trinity or a more serious matter like fund-raising for the church. I remember helping with the children's group in the back sacristy and was once congratulated by a mother for my explanation of the Trinity! I actually found it easier to cut up pumpkins for halloween.

Every Sunday was an adventure at St Mary's. I remember a shirtless man wearing a Santa Clause beanie wandering

in to sample the wine from the chalice on the altar and uttering thanks to all and sundry. Peter often had to handle what could be difficult situations and showed his great gift for diffusing possible disasters. I believe he trained Terry by example. This 'watch me' training method used to be common in other professions such as medicine and teaching.

A memorable Sunday had a young assistant dispensing Freddo frogs to the children whilst his elders were busy with the bread. He could be heard saying respectfully "the body of the frog" to the grateful recipients.

Perhaps the music at the old place stands out as spectacular in my memory with challenging hymns, different choirs and solo performances on the grand piano. Peter did his bit with the 'Eriskay Love Lilt' in our latter days there before our mass migration down the road to TLC.

Perhaps the chorus from Nabucco by Verdi would be appropriate as I reflect - the beautiful 'Slaves Chorus', where they sadly sang during their captivity in Babylon - *our thoughts fly on wings of gold as we remember Sion.*

My thoughts also often fly back to those days up the road. Nevertheless I am so happy to be part of the loving, caring, accepting and inspiring remnant - St Mary's in Exile. We still have great music and musicians. We love the homilies which provoke discussion in our cluster groups. We still have Peter and Terry. What more could one ask?

*Tony Carrol*



I sit in the clouds...  
Soft tinkle of Yak bells as they feed on bamboo  
Gentle Sikkimese voices  
The drip of rain  
And I am dry under rotunda  
Cane and mud surround me

And yet I am happy  
To be alone  
Here in the Himalayas  
Exhausted after day's trek  
Rising through rainforest to 3000 metres  
Crossing raging rivers on swinging bridges  
Stepping on the edge of mountain landslides  
Dodging horse and yak shit  
Meeting every Trekker with Namaste

It is a soft place here in the clouds  
With the smell of smoke preparing food  
Yak bells softly ringing

And the gentleness of dripping rain.

*Michael Tansky*



# Wander, Wonder and Ponder



*“When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I set aside childish ways.” 1 Cor13:11*

When I was younger my faith felt so much more straightforward. The Bible didn’t seem complicated or challenging. Now my faith feels embedded in me but also totally in flux. The Bible seems so full of holes but so much more relevant. On top of this God feels so near as to be one with my DNA but any words I use seem inadequate or wrong.

Given this, how do I now see the Christian feasts of the Ascension and Pentecost? We hear claims like:

- We celebrate that Jesus ascended into Heaven.
- It is the birth of the Church.
- It is the coming of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus had to go so the Spirit could come down to us.

The claims are full of so much manure the bulls must have diarrhoea. It needs a good going over with a rake so life can show through.

The coming of the Holy Spirit! Wait a minute, God is and always will be here and now the ground of all creation. There is no coming or going. There is continuous interaction where God draws us into more fully to the flow of the trinity with herself.

Jesus had to go so that the Spirit could come! So wrong as God in all forms has been continuously with us. Also God is not a wrestling tag team where Jesus goes so the Spirit can come. This is just wrong.

The ascension of Jesus was a late addition to the bible. It came to fill a void. If God came to Jesus at baptism or birth then God must depart at some point. God is portrayed as flitting in and out of the world. Like a God from Mt Olympus God comes down and entered Mary and became human. Mary, like the earth with a seed, was just a womb for it to grow in. That is a worldview we no longer can accept so I see no relevance to the Ascension now. The

kingdom of God is NOW not some future event. Live your life knowing love and giving it.

How can Pentecost be the birth of the Church? It is not even in any of the earliest Christian writings (Paul’s letters, the Gospels of Mark or Matthew). In Luke’s Acts and the Gospel of John they are at different times (at the ascension and way after) and appear way different (Acts is a major event with loud winds, fire and gift of speech that drew large crowds where John has Jesus breathing on them all in calm and peace). Also the apostles are Jews not Christians at this time. They are not a separate group and have no gentile members. It is years later that even the name Christian was ever used. How can there be a church in these circumstances?

Personally, I feel even figuratively speaking of the birth of the Church feels wrong as it denotes a separation between us and all others which I do not see in the ministry of Jesus. I see Jesus as inclusive of everyone. Eating with sinners and pharisees. Speaking with Jews and Samaritans. Healing Jews and Gentiles. I can see it as a figurative acknowledgement of and christening of the community taking on the legacy of Jesus to act as a community and be supportive of each other and those around them. Spreading love and caring to all.

I recently read a quote that went something like this:

*“Where you cannot find love, plant it and you will find it.”*

This I feel is what we are asked to do.

I feel all these words are true but incomplete. I know what I say and think is imperfect. All words are as they are finite and God by definition is infinite. This just makes it easier to respect everyone else’s beliefs and acknowledge and look for the God behind and within every person I meet.

Love means accepting people as they are, not what you want them to be.

*Kevin Ryan*

# Creativity

Creativity is an action. It is when we bring something from our own thoughts or imagination into being or when we make something possible for the good of others and the universe. It is something we do from a loving heart that can bring joy to others. Obviously human beings are not creative when we are destructive of others and the universe and when we are trying to be a dominant force.

I agree with Mary Oliver in her beautiful little poem, *Song of the Builders*, that we all have creative capacity and we are all called to be part of the creative work of the universe. I'm sure you have all been creative in your lives. Often we are not aware of it.

When I reflect on my life, I realize I have been creative in the ordinary activities of my life such as raising my children, teaching secondary students, guiding educational change, caring for my late husband, Ray, and more recently, mediating disputes.

Our creative activities rest within a wider, universal story.

Modern science has highlighted the creativity of the universe. Through evolution, the universe has unfolded and continues to unfold. It is in a continual birthing process in which new forms are emerging out of new relationships. We have evolved through this creative process.

The French Jesuit, Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1985) who understood evolution as a growth in consciousness said, 'Our duty as men and women is to proceed as if limit to our ability did not exist. We are collaborators in creation.'

Meister Eckhart (the 13th century mystic) says that creativity is the birthing of God's Word and our role is to give birth to the Word i.e. to bring the Divine into our lives and to give birth to love, hope and greater unity. It is then that we give full meaning to the quotation in Genesis that we are made in the image and likeness of God.

The cosmologist Brian Swimme says the question is not am I creative? But how do I release the creativity that I am? He asks how can we construct a life that taps into the creativity that is pulsating through the universe and is within each of us?

Firstly, he acknowledges we are creative in different ways and it is important to identify our unique creative gifts. He suggests we pay attention to those ideas/activities that attract us, that draw us out, as these passions can lead us to our unique gifts. When we identify them, he says we need to cherish them, protect them, develop them and use them as they can provide the unique creative work that is needed in the universe.



Kevin presiding at Eucharist with his two children. This demonstrates 'a huge shift in our liturgical practice'

Secondly, he says that we are inspired to be creative in different ways and it is helpful to reflect on those elements of life that enhance our creativity and those that drain or block our creativity. When we become aware of that, as far as possible, we should seek out and let into our lives what enhances our creativity and avoid what stifles it.

Thirdly, Swimme recommends we pay careful attention to those nagging feelings inside ourselves that something we are observing is not right. For you may be the person called to plant the seed; to bring to birth a new idea; or a new way of doing things and in this way improve the lives of others and contribute to the ongoing creativity of the universe. Uncomfortableness about something can be a great trigger for creativity.

In some workplaces and institutions, creativity is highly valued, but in others it is not. While wonderful creativity takes place in so many of the Catholic Church's agencies and schools, the Church itself, in its doctrine and structure, has been stuck in closed systems and held in place by structures of power.

Ten years ago, the St Mary's in Exile community experienced an incompatibility with the fixed form mentality of the Church and made a very creative decision to leave. We have continued to be open to creativity, open to change. It has required for many of us a huge shift in our thinking and liturgical practice. I have every confidence that we are being drawn forward towards something new, something that is vital for the unfolding of love and unity in the universe.

If we consider creativity as something that we pour our hearts and minds into to enhance life, there is a multitude of ways to be creative in our homes, our gardens, our leisure activities, our workplaces and in our relationships with all those we encounter.

Being aware of how our creativity and life choices can influence the direction of evolution can shift our perspective. We can look with fresh eyes at ordinary experiences and find within them the opportunity to give birth to love and unity.

We can become more attuned to the need for creative thinking and we can have a greater sense of being

co-creators. We can also assist in nurturing the creativity of others. Meister Eckhart calls it “igniting the spark of the soul”.

During Lent we were asked to Open Our Hearts to the creativity in our lives. Becoming more aware of our creativity and nurturing it is an ongoing process. Like the rest of the universe, we are unfinished. I will conclude with a little poem, *Dancing in Tune*, that I have written to remind my self to see each day as an opportunity for creativity.

*Extracts from Homily 30-31 March - Creativity*

*Margaret Clifford*

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## Dancing in Tune

The day demands to dance  
having arrived  
dressed in all its beauty  
its sunlight waiting impatiently  
around my bed

But I will not  
step into my mind  
let my eyelids rise  
place my feet upon the earth  
till my spirit is in tune

I will hollow out  
and hearken  
let silence fill  
every cell  
every fountain in my body

I will lie with it  
in stillness  
till the sweet sounds  
of listening  
overcome me  
become me

Then I will arise  
and dance the day  
as though it is  
my last

*Margaret Clifford*

# Let's Panic



*Prime Minister Scott Morrison holding up a lump of coal in the Federal Parliament saying "it won't hurt you".*

As the dust settles after the 2019 Federal Election, change is in the air.

It's the morning after the federal election and I woke with a mild sense of panic. By that, I mean before my eyes even opened, before any thoughts had a chance to form in my head, as my body awoke, the first sensation I felt was a tight gripping in my chest.

There could be many reasons for this. But usually I'm pretty good at isolating the cause of an emotion - even if the intensity of it doesn't match the situation. But today, there was no clear 'prompting event' for this sense of panic. I did not hear a sound that made me afraid for my safety. I did not have a thought that sparked a feeling of dread.

I simply awoke with my chest tight and my breathing shallow.

And I'm expecting to feel this way for a while.

Until the dust settles, until the shock of it all is absorbed into my bones.

Yesterday I went to the polls feeling weirdly excited to be participating in our democracy. I had this really clear sense that I was exercising my greatest super power in changing this world - my vote.

Perhaps the crushing of that dream is what's led to this gripping in my chest.

On the one hand, as I left my parents' house where I'd been watching Antony Green's coverage (until I couldn't anymore), I reflected that this kind of result - and the shock I feel from it - reinforces what we know about the 'bubble'. No, not the Canberra bubble, and not the carbon

bubble. The social bubble. The one where we surround ourselves with people who largely share our views, and that social media algorithms have evolved to mirror. So we genuinely have no sense of the actuality of broad public opinion.

My bubble's just been burst. And while the tiny slivers of liquid soap slowly float to the floor to be absorbed into the grass we take that time to recalibrate. And it can be painful. That recalibration can take us to a dark place. One of disbelief. One of hopelessness.

Just yesterday I'd been saying to people, "I feel like change is in the air. It has to be. We are running out of time to make meaningful contribution towards climate action. We're running out of time to have conversations about a just and sustainable transition to renewables that doesn't leave whole communities behind. We're running out of time to get the ball rolling, and we don't have another election cycle to wait. So there MUST be change coming."

Well, there will be change. Not the kind I hoped for yesterday, but positive nonetheless.

Because we've been down this road before.

Three years ago, I stood nine months pregnant - with my three year old by my side - outside a polling booth in the electorate of Dickson, with Peter Dutton's beady eyes staring across at me from coreflute signs that read "no children in detention" (yeah, right). I handed out green pamphlets and urged people to vote with their conscience for a better world for their and my kids, for serious climate action, for closure of Manus and Nauru, for real solutions to the affordable housing crisis.

And three years ago I felt sickened and sad at the result that night.



But when that weekend was over I woke up and I went to work at my job. My job at a social enterprise. My job at an ethical super fund. My job, persuading tens of thousands of Aussies to move their money out of fossil fuels, detention centres, gambling, tobacco and weapons. My job, working to cut these industries off at their knees. My job, helping invest millions into renewables and social impact bonds. My job, making meaningful change.

And within a couple of weeks the feeling of panic subsided. Because I knew I was part of something bigger than politics.

Change is coming. It doesn't look the way I hoped it would last night, but it's coming.

Because it has to.

If we want to thrive as a species, we need to change.

If we want to survive as a species, we need to change.

If we don't want to burn ourselves to death, fight each other out of existence, leave each other to perish on open seas when fleeing for our lives, or live in an overcrowded dog-eat-dog post-apocalyptic world... we need to change.

Because to paraphrase the visionary young Greta Thunberg: We need to panic. We need to act as if the house is on fire - because it is.

So we should panic.

I should panic. You should panic.

Let's panic.

Why? Because panic is a power source like any other. Like all things in this universe it's a transfer of energy. And it's a powerful one.

Panic drives action.

And it drives solution.

We need to harness the panic we feel today.

We need to use the source of energy this panic offers us as its gift.

We need to direct it into positive action.

We need to rise up as a collection of people who care.

We do not need to be the majority to make a difference.

We just need to be loud. We just need to be smart. We just need to be considered. We just need to be persuasive. We just need to be driven.

We need to have great ideas. And we need to execute them well.

And that doesn't seem that hard.

We have great dreamers and thinkers in our midst.

We have great persuaders and storytellers in our midst.

We have great analysts and operators in our midst.

We have great doers in our midst.

We CAN make this change happen.

We must.

It's time to transcend our fears of the everyday - the fear of doing things differently, the fear of not having adequate systems and processes, the fear of things not working.

We need to be radical. We need to try and fail, and try and fail, and keep on trying and keep on failing, quickly and swiftly, so we can land on the things that work before having a workable solution is too late to do any good.

What skills do you have? How can you harness them in this shift? What does it look like to do things differently to help build the world you want to see?

Do you have the big idea and you need the best and brightest to help you execute it?

Are you a details oriented go-getter and you need a visionary leader to get behind?

Are you an analytical numbers-cruncher and you crave something meaningful to analyse?

Are you wealthy, and you want to inject your wealth into making a brighter, fairer, cleaner future for your children and grandchildren?

Whatever your story - now is the time to put things into action. Now is the time to be part of the change. Now is the time.

Let's rise up together.

Let's change things.

Because I, for one, want the human species to survive.

*Noelle*

# Palm Sunday: A Day of Two Parades



This year, our Lenten theme was *Open our Hearts*. On Palm Sunday we were invited to open our hearts to peace. It is not traditionally a day of peace, but, rather, a day of jubilation as it recognizes Jesus' triumphal entry into Jerusalem.

However, according to New Testament scholars, Marcus Borg and John Dominic Crossan, the Triumphal Entry was not all that it has traditionally seemed. These scholars argue that Jesus' journey into Jerusalem that day was not a carnival, but a protest against the injustices of the Roman occupation. Jesus' entry on a donkey was an act of political theatre designed to mock the pomp and ceremony of Rome.<sup>1</sup>

Palm Sunday is traditionally associated with the Jewish feast of the Passover, a time when Jewish pilgrims travelled to Jerusalem to commemorate the Israelites' escape from Egypt.<sup>1</sup> Some scholars say that there were three major Jewish feasts each year and that the events of Palm Sunday and the Crucifixion actually happened when the waving of palm branches was part of the celebrations.<sup>2</sup> We'll come back to that later, but, for now, let's stay with Borg and Crossan and the Passover.

Every year, the Roman governor of Judea would ride up to Jerusalem from his coastal residence, specifically to be present for the feast. At such a time, the pilgrims swelled the population of Jerusalem to four times its usual size. So, it was a good time for the governor to come in all of his majesty to remind the Jewish pilgrims that Rome was in charge. They could commemorate an ancient victory against Egypt if they wanted to, but real, present-day resistance was futile.<sup>1</sup>

At the time of the particular Passover in question, the parade of Pontius Pilate into Jerusalem was to show power and to keep the peace. But it was not real peace. It was control, maintained by oppression, domination and fear. We might call it fake peace.

Borg and Crossan claim that Jesus planned a counter procession. As Pilate entered Jerusalem regally and

majestically from the west, Jesus entered from the east, provocatively, on a donkey, looking powerless and vulnerable and into a community ripe for revolution. By his actions on Palm Sunday, Jesus challenged an oppressive and violent empire and declared a dramatically different kingdom, where justice, freedom and true peace reign. Borg and Crossan feel that Jesus realized that his actions would very likely lead to execution.<sup>1</sup>

Anglican Bishop, John Shelby Spong, has a theory as to how the protest became a triumphal procession. He suggests that the Gospel writers were trying to make sense out of the crucifixion because it was seen as Pilate's victory. The insurgent was executed. But the Gospel writers were trying to portray Jesus as the Messiah, the saviour, not just a political rabble-rouser who was executed. So, they presented Jesus' entry as triumphal, suitable for the Messiah and pre-empting the glory of the resurrection. And the story was reset from one of the other feasts to the Passover to associate Jesus with Moses. Passover commemorates Moses' saving of the Israelites from their oppressors in Egypt and leading them to freedom. The Gospel writers wanted to portray Jesus as the new and better Moses, the new and better saviour. They needed to do it in a way that their readers would understand, so they used words and images from the Jewish scriptures,<sup>2</sup> specifically Zechariah: 'your king comes to you, triumphant and victorious, humble and riding on a donkey and he shall command peace to the nations'.<sup>3</sup>

So, the Gospel writers used a suitable context to convey their message of Jesus as the Messiah. We, too must embrace the story in our context. We have to identify the two parades as they are in our time and our place. Our world offers military might, nuclear deterrence and control. It's easy to join the processions which have the most power.<sup>2</sup> Palm Sunday invites us to be out of step with that parade and to join the counter-procession;<sup>4</sup> the one in which power comes from love not from domination;<sup>2</sup> the one in which peace comes from freedom, not from control.

As we reflect on the two parades of Palm Sunday, we can remember another procession back in 2009 when we moved humbly and yet defiantly from the Church to the TLC building to begin our lives as a community in exile. It happened because we rejected the parade of patriarchal structures and outdated theology.<sup>5</sup> We accepted a different parade and carved our own journey and our own meaningful liturgies. In 2017, Terry wrote in his Community Report that, 'in exile, we stand in solidarity with refugees who have had to flee their homeland and with indigenous people throughout the world who have been removed from their culture'. He wrote that 'we share exile with those served by Micah Projects who have nowhere to call home; and with the Dali Lama, unable to return to his people in Tibet; we share exile with the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh in exile from his beloved Vietnam since his stance for peace; we share exile with the people of Palestine who for the last 100 years have been brutally betrayed and crushed by a colonising force'.<sup>5</sup>

So, as we commemorate the trials of Holy Week, we are

invited to commemorate our choice of parade and to open our hearts to true peace, through freedom and justice.

*Liz Little*

Footnotes:

1. Thomas, Debie, posted 18 March, 2018, <https://www.journeywithjesus.net/essays/1708-parade-or-protest>
2. <https://pastordawn.com/2013/03/18/marching-in-the-wrong-parades-a-palm-sunday-sermon/#more-3670>
3. Zechariah. 9:9-10
4. <https://gregoryjenks.com/2017/04/09/different-drum-beats/>
5. Fitzpatrick, Terry, 2017, An SMX Community Report

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## The Nature of Prayer

*A prayer need not be a rhetorical address,  
Or an itemized petition,  
or lips moved soundlessly inside a cathedral,  
or even words spoken into the air.*

*A prayer may be wordless inner longing,  
a sudden outpouring of love, a yearning within the soul,  
to be for a moment united with the infinite and the good,  
a humbleness that needs no abasement or speech to express a  
cry in the darkness for help when all seems lost.*

*A song, a poem, a kind deed, a reaching for beauty,  
or the strong, quiet inner reaffirmation of faith.  
A prayer in fact can be anything that is created of God that  
turns to God.*

*From "Ludmilla, a legend of Liechtenstein" By Paul Gallico  
Submitted by Ingerid Meagher*



# Anniversay Liturgy and Party



*The choristers made great music at our 10th Anniversay Liturgy.*



*Some of the 150 people who enjoyed our tenth Anniversay Party .*







**Just a few of the great crowd at the Party**

*Photography: Ian Ridley.*





# Don't believe what you think

*"I think Donald Trump is a genius", "I think Donald Trump is an idiot".*

A significant percentage of the people in America believe one of these statements. Assuming that one of them is correct, or partially correct, the other must be wrong. That means there are millions of Americans who believe something that is obviously false.

I use this example, not to encourage debate over Donald Trump's competence, but to illustrate the point that we humans have a tendency to believe things that we think are correct – often without doing any research or critical analysis to try to arrive at an informed decision.

One of the disturbing trends in modern society is once we form an opinion on something, it's now possible to select "news" feeds which confirm and reinforce our views and often are highly critical of people who have a different view. Just because we and other like-minded people believe something, doesn't mean that we are right.

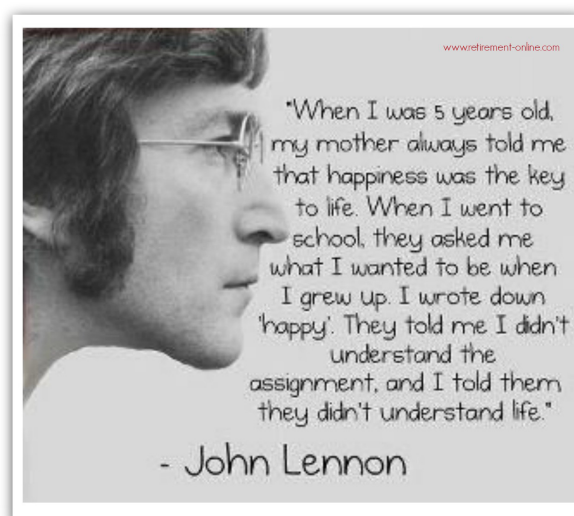
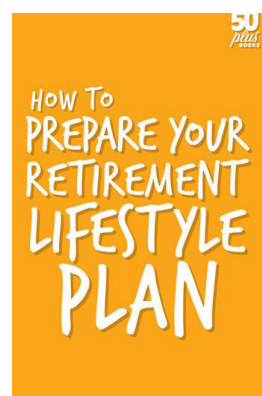
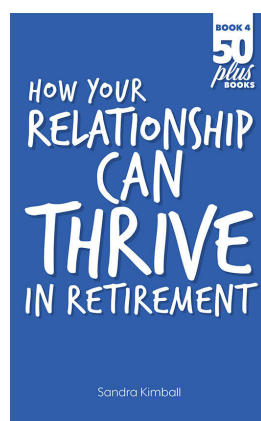
The reality is that there's nothing very special about what we think. Thousands of random thoughts flow through our minds every day. Some are disciplined and based on knowledge or research while others are pure fantasy. We all have an internal voice (our ego) which talks to us and often encourages us to think and act in a certain way or form certain opinions. The danger is that we can easily start to believe these thoughts and they can become our own misguided version of reality.

It's important to realise that we are not the sum of our thoughts. We have a mind which is very good at processing the thoughts that pass through it, but our mind and our thoughts are quite different entities. One of the great challenges we face in life is to control our mind.

Hopefully, as we grow older we gain some useful experience and wisdom which we can use to make wiser decisions. While decision making is far simpler if issues are perceived in black and white – good and bad / right and wrong, life is rarely that simple. Generally both sides of an argument have some valid points and we are more likely to find an acceptable solution if we are prepared to discuss and consider another person's views, which are different from ours. It's unfortunate that such an obvious approach to resolving differences is becoming so unfashionable in today's society.

If you're interested in the idea of using your thoughts to help you find a happier and healthier life, you'll find lots of good information and advice in our range of books. They are available from our website at [www.retirementbooks.com.au](http://www.retirementbooks.com.au).

Paul McKeon



# Baptism of Jesus

## (and how this relates to our moving into exile)



The Baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist is one of the few parts of the Gospels that the scholars are confident actually happened. They cite two reasons for thinking this.

Firstly, they locate four independent records of the event. Although all four Gospels record the baptism, only two are considered independent records. Luke and Matthew are not because they are believed to have used Mark as a source. Mark's and John's Gospels are considered independent because they did not use any of the others as sources.<sup>1</sup>

Matthew and Luke also used a source known as Q, which no longer exists and may have been just an oral collection of the sayings of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Mark did not use that source, so Q is considered to be a third independent record.<sup>3</sup>

The fourth independent source is considered to be the writings of the respected first century Jewish historian, Josephus, who describes the activities of John the Baptist.<sup>3</sup>

The second criteria used to judge authenticity is that of embarrassment. The scholars feel that the early Christians would have been embarrassed by the event. Firstly, it makes John, the baptizer, superior to Jesus. The aim of the Gospel writing was to present Jesus as the hero. Secondly, the early Christians saw baptism as cleansing sins. They taught that Jesus was without sin, yet they recorded him being baptized. They would have to have had good reasons for including the event in the Gospels.<sup>3</sup> The scholars say that the Baptism of Jesus represents the start of Jesus' public ministry, the main focus of the Gospels.

Historically, John the Baptist was a revolutionary who felt that political occupation and religious corruption had caused the people to stray from their commitment to the God of Moses. John's shouting in the wilderness was his way of warning the people to repent; to turn around and follow a different path, back to Yahweh.<sup>4</sup>

John the Baptist also preached the imminent return of an Old Testament God, one who would overthrow the Romans and punish those who were not true to the Jewish faith of Moses. He was calling for readiness for the return of a vengeful and violent god.<sup>5</sup>

John the Baptist did not have a Christian understanding of repentance with lists of personal failures and personal forgiveness. People were asked to acknowledge that Israel as a nation had failed to live up to the covenant between Yahweh and Moses.<sup>6</sup>

John the Baptist chose baptism in flowing water as part of the repentance because ritual cleansing was such a big part of Judaism. The Baptism of Jesus was a Jewish ritual, a symbol of repentance, of cleansing the sins of a nation.<sup>7</sup>

By going down to the River Jordan and submitting to John's baptism of repentance, Jesus was choosing to identify himself with a political revolutionary. Just like John, Jesus intended to challenge the political and religious authorities.<sup>4</sup>

If the scholars are confident that Jesus really was baptised by John in the Jordan River, they are also pretty sure that what came immediately after the baptism, probably did not happen, certainly not as it is recorded.

Mark's Gospel says that, as Jesus left the water, the heavens tore apart, the spirit descended on him like a dove and a voice from heaven said, 'You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased'. (Mark 1:10-11) Some scholars see this as an attempt by the Gospel writers to put a Christian slant on a Jewish ritual, to make Jesus superior to John by calling Jesus the son, the beloved.<sup>7</sup>

But other scholars think that the dramatic voice was a symbol of what happened later when Jesus moved away from John's movement.<sup>7</sup>

It seems that Jesus outgrew it. John Dominic Crossan suggests that Jesus came to notice that Yahweh was not violent or vengeful and did not intervene. Crossan says that Jesus could see that, if a better world were going to happen, then human beings need to create it.<sup>6</sup> The outgrowing could have been sudden insight or a more gradual, incremental understanding to which Jesus came.

The two parts of the baptism story, the water ritual and the dramatic declaration, tell the story of Jesus as a person wanting a better world; of a person joining a movement, but later outgrowing it and finding a new way to work towards that better world.

Many of us were baptized into an organization that we may feel we have now outgrown. The gospel writers have Jesus, after his baptism, head off into the wilderness to find his own way down a rather different path.<sup>4</sup> Some might say that we left the mainstream church and headed off into the wilderness to find our own way. But the word



wilderness implies barren and negative and our exile has been far from that.

Our exile has given us much, both individually and communally. It has given us the freedom to question, the freedom to put aside the distractions of traditional dogma and the freedom to value diversity.

Our exile has given us the space to explore what it means to be fully human, what we understand by the sacred and how we can find inspiration through our scriptures and through other literature.

Our exile has allowed us to experiment with different forms of liturgy, to nurture our spirituality and different forms of language in our quest for inclusiveness.



It has given us the freedom to find our own way of being truly human.

And we have our own proud story, a story that others saw as important enough to reproduce as a book, as several national television docs and as a state theatre company drama. In terms of media, we probably live a little more quietly now than during those heady days ten years ago, but we are still here and we have a rich, shared experience to celebrate.

In some form or other, we have each heard the dramatic voice of the Gospel story, or perhaps the still, small voice that Elijah heard,<sup>7</sup> calling us to love, calling us to be the best people we can be and calling us to work towards making this world the best place it can be. And over the last ten years, we have had the freedom to explore that calling and to find our own ways of responding to it. And that is certainly worth celebrating.

*Homily – Liz Little – 4/5 May 2019*

#### Footnotes:

- 1 Bishop, James, 2016, <http://reasonsforjesus.com/jesus-baptized-historical-evidence-baptism/>
- 2 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Q\\_source](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Q_source)
- 3 Bishop, James, 2016, <http://reasonsforjesus.com/jesus-baptized-historical-evidence-baptism/>
- 4 <https://pastordawn.com/2015/01/07/a-progressive-christian-wades-into-the-waters-of-baptism-2/>
- 5 <https://bible.org/article/jesus-baptism-its-historicity-and-implications>
- 6 [https://www.ucobserver.org/faith/2011/07/john\\_crossan/](https://www.ucobserver.org/faith/2011/07/john_crossan/)
- 7 1 Kings 19:12



# Steadfast

## Paying Attention in an Open and Welcoming Heart (Kindness)

I notice that I can be somewhat impulsive at times (opposite to what I thought “steadfast” was) and I notice that I can often have dark spaces in my heart (the very opposite of an “open heart”) so to have been gifted with this theme was quite a huge challenge.

I felt that I understood the open heart – one of welcome and kindness but I struggled with “steadfast.”

Is steadfast what I learned from my mother as a mother of eight children and few resources? Just that ability to keep going no matter what?

Is steadfast the same as the sheer determination I showed as a child growing up to get good grades at school?

Was it a steadfast faith that I had after having left Boarding School (which in many ways was the routine of a Convent) motivated me to become a PALMS Lay Missionary and then join the Presentation Sisters?

Was my staying in the Congregation for twelve years a sign of being steadfast or was the fact that I left the Order after twelve years a loss of faithfulness or steadfastness?

Has my commitment to education over all my working life a sign of steadfastness? Have efforts to encourage resilience in students been attempts to encourage them to stay the course, rather than give up easily?

Am I getting any closer to the meaning of steadfastness? Is it determination? endurance? resolve? resilience? faithfulness? resoluteness? perseverance? Perhaps Scripture can help us unravel it or make it even more complex ...

The Old Testament is full of promises by Yahweh that God is steadfast in love for us...

“Give thanks to the Lord, for the Lord is good, God’s love is everlasting...” says the Psalmist... Surely we can say that an unconditional love that lasts forever is steadfast?

At the end of great chaos in the story of Noah and the Flood, God reminds Noah that whenever he sees the rainbow, that is a sign of God’s faithfulness. The promise that a rainbow can remind us of the presence of the Divine also reminds us of a presence that is steadfast in our lives.

Through the words of the Prophet Isaiah we are told, “Do not be afraid I am with you.... through raging waters, through fire, the seas” - through the ups and downs of life. Can we really believe in that steadfast presence?

The stories of Jesus of the New Testament give us many instances of him being steadfast against temptation to materialism in the desert, steadfast in his mission, steadfast in his message. Jesus says in the Gospel “Once the hand is laid on the plough, no one who looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.” This referred to a light Palestinian plough where the farmer had one hand on the plough and the other on the unruly oxen. If the farmer turned his head around, the furrow would become crooked, so the message is clear to pay attention to what is now for the furrows of our life to unfold.

As we remember the events of Holy Week, we see Jesus silently steadfast on a donkey coming into Jerusalem, silently steadfast in the Garden of Gethsemane, “Father if this cup cannot pass away....unless I drink it...your will be done.” Steadfast when questioned by Pilate, and steadfast and stoic in that final act of surrender “Into your hands I commend my spirit”.

The very early Christians were referred to as “steadfast” in the face of persecution. We see the Apostle Paul steadfast in his determination to keep alive what were seen as values of the man Jesus.

Christian Saints were seen as steadfast also in the face of persecution, martyrdom or in trying to meet the needs of the poor.

The Benedictine vow called stability or steadfastness is likely not familiar to you, unless you’ve either attended a monastic profession ceremony at some point, or you are a Benedictine.

St Benedict said to his monks that to honour the vow of stability means we strive to be present in mind and in body - seeking to engage our brothers beyond a merely superficial level. Stability demands we be generous in sharing our lives by allowing others to know us, ready to share ourselves through contributions to the common life. So here I found an echo of what I think steadfast is: paying attention to having an open heart, a kind heart.

When we pay attention to the deepest stirrings of our soul or to having an open, kind heart, this continual paying attention from moment to moment can become steadfastness. The founder of Psychosynthesis, Roberto Assagioli said, “Whatever we pay attention to reverberates in our lives.”

Hindi philosophy says, “Whatever you put your attention on will grow stronger in your life...”

Steadfastness in a good sense calls us to pay attention to what is good - our soul, our spirit stirring deep within - to keep paying attention to having an open, kind heart from moment to moment. Then what is good for me, what is good for us and what is good for the world will reverberate in our lives and be expressed in quality connections. These quality connections can spur us on steadfastly to open our hearts to the marginalised.

I give the last word to Julian of Norwich. Imagine if we kept saying this over and over in our mind....paying attention

to having an open, kind heart and saying, 'All shall be well, and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well.'

*Narelle Mullins*

Julian of Norwich also said:

*If there is anywhere on earth a lover of God who is always kept safe, I know nothing of it, for it was not shown to me. But this was shown: that in falling and rising again we are always kept in that same precious love.*



## ***The Mountain Top***

*I gaze at this mountain in front of me*

*As I consider what I do believe.*

*To be formed by none other than God's perfect hand*

*I could never, no never conceive*

*And this mountain gives witness to work and toil*

*As I marvel at its fine green array*

*The potential of every human being*

*I believe in as I view this display*

*But this mountain for me is more than plant and soil.*

*It's a challenge that beckons me*

*To climb to the top one painful step at a time*

*To the fullness of eternity*

*I've climbed, I've fallen, I've achieved and slipped again*

*On my own the top cannot be mine*

*But in God, with you and one with the world,*

*I'll surely make it up my mountain of pine*

*Narelle Mullins*

# St. Mary's and Inclusive Catholics

Many of us, members of Inclusive Catholics in Melbourne read your powerful publication St. Mary's Matters. There's so much inspiring material there that gives heart and hope to what so many of us are trying to achieve - living the Gospel message and bypassing, or trying to, the archaic and inflexible rulings of the hierarchical Church.

You hold your weekly Mass in the Trades Hall building; ours is in the Uniting Church in Glen Iris, where the minister and congregation welcome us and occasionally share ecumenical services with us; some meals also.

At about the same time that you were holding your Review of St Mary's in Exile last year, our Inclusive Catholics held our own. There were some similarities between the two.

Being a small group, we have always struggled somewhat with our bank balance. A couple of drives over the years have helped build it up, a recent one bringing in some good relief.

We have experienced a fall in numbers over the past few years but for some time now the group has stayed quite steady. Our Eucharists are held every second week and we're a good mixed bunch of enthusiastic people coming from different faith directions. Besides Greg Reynolds, our excommunicated priest, and those of us from the Catholic tradition, there are members from the Anglican, Uniting and Baptist churches and others disgruntled about the way the Churches have been behaving.

Among us are people who have been abused, those who've tried to act on abuse and one who had his role as a Eucharistic minister in his parish church taken away because the parish priest found out he was a member of Inclusive Catholics! Greg Reynolds remains a thorn in the side of the hierarchy – and some of these men are themselves scratchy thorns for us!

Before each Mass we have a short meditation time. Do you still have the resonating note of the gong calming the mind and leading into prayerfulness? Lovely, that!



*A group of Inclusive Catholic travelling back home from the ACCCR conference in Canberra last March.*

We have homilists from within our congregation and from other churches speaking on biblical texts, topical issues and life matters.

And like you, we have a lay Mass Leader. One of the most attractive and meaningful ways we celebrate Mass is by our all-inclusive sharing in the whole ceremony; communal involvement in every way for the enrichment of all. It's all good and joyful, caring and reaching out.

You have your convivial café coffee after Mass. After our Mass we gather in the little dining area

for coffee, nibbles and a good chat. Recently we celebrated a lay-led Eucharist in a local café.

Our annual weekend Retreat attracts a good number of us regulars and others; for a change this year we are holding two single day Retreats.

A discussion Forum is held every month in private homes with well-known speakers.

And we have a few meals out together during the year.

Occasionally on the in-between Sundays we go to other denominational Church Services.

Let's hope and pray that we can keep alive and well, all of us and support each other!

*Jan Coleman*

## St Mary's Matters | Winter 2019

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**St Mary's in Exile celebrates liturgy at the Trades and Labour Council Building, 16 Peel St, South Brisbane  
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You are welcome to attend at any of these times!**



