

ST JAMES' CHURCH, KING STREET, SYDNEY

## HOMILY AT THE REQUIEM EUCHARIST FOR RICHARD GILLARD

7 July 2022

*"The Value of Relationships"*

**Readings:** Isaiah 25: 6-10; Revelation 21: 1-7 & Matthew 25: 31-46.

### **A Journey Through Relationships**

'What is a cynic?' asks Cecil Graham in Oscar Wilde's 'Lady Windemere's Fan.' To which the reply came: 'A man who knows the price of everything and the value of nothing.' As we come to give thanks for Richard Gillard's life we take the opportunity to consider the value of relationships.

Economic rationalism tells us that the value of something is to be gauged principally by its usefulness and productivity expressed in monetary terms. In this system people are supposed to be paid based on how their work contributes and is valued by society. It is likewise a good measure of a person's power and status in the community. There are, however, some anomalies in this system because it would appear that politicians are valued more than teachers, footballers more than police officers, and bank CEOs more than doctors. We are told that this is the 'natural order of things', but is it and should it be this way?

In contrast, Jesus taught about the Kingdom of God. It is a phrase he often used to describe the nature of God's world. This is not to be confused with what popular culture refers to as 'heaven' – a perfect place we go to when we die. The 'Kingdom' to which Jesus referred is not so much a place as a social dynamic based on God's authority over our lives operating in the here and now and giving expression to God's values. In short, the Kingdom is about relationships.

### **The Kingdom of God**

The Kingdom is therefore the manifestation of God's intention for humanity; a return to paradise, (or the garden of Eden if you like), where humans were meant to live in peace and harmony with one another, with nature, and with God. It may otherwise be described as the rule of God's love.

Richard is one who highly valued relationships, not because of their usefulness but because they are a source of joy, goodness, and a recognition of God's presence in humanity – all humanity. Of the many comments I have heard about Richard over the

past week or so, a common theme has been of how Richard loved people and gave of himself for the common good. This includes his work with AMP and ANZ, as a leader in this parish, as well as his work with St Laurence House and the Anglican Board of Mission.

The kingdom of this world blesses the rich and powerful, but it is not so with God - which may explain God's unpopularity in the western world today. The Kingdom of God is about justice, fairness, peace, goodness, not only in the context of the next world but even more so in the here and now. Moreover, you can see the presence of the Kingdom when you see people living as God intended – where love rules ‘doing to others as you would have them do to you.’

*Jesus said: ‘Then the king will say to those at his right hand, “Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” (Matthew 25: 34-36)*

You will note that the king did not ask ‘Did you believe the right things, or did you lead a morally superior life?’. The way of the Kingdom is about seeking the common good and especially by being focussed on those in need. Other words that could be used for this are ‘vulnerability’, ‘hospitality’, and ‘compassion’, which are things Richard demonstrated in his life, and which also reflect the nature of God.

### **Hospitality and God’s Welcome**

Now, while we mention hospitality, it is important to remember that hospitality was central to Richard’s life – both giving and receiving it. In short; he enjoyed a party, or a Sunday lunch with friends, or a parish social event, or indeed any other occasion where people could enjoy each other’s company. Moreover, Richard was a creator of hospitality by welcoming and drawing people together – it was part of his ministry.

The Hebrew prophet Isaiah likened the Kingdom of God to a heavenly feast. As he wrote:

*On this mountain the Lord of hosts will make for all peoples a feast of rich food, a feast of well-matured wines, of rich food filled with marrow, of well-matured wines strained clear. (Isaiah 25: 6)*

The prophet goes on to say that God will bring an end to those things that destroy life, even death itself. It is a vision of the way that God intended things to be in a world where there is enough for everyone, where people will live in peace and justice, where all are welcomed and can live their lives with dignity. This is the world of hospitality the world of relationships - the Kingdom of God.

The prophet's image of God's world is also taken up in the reading from the Revelation to John.

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.'* (Revelation 21: 3b-4)

Please note that the image here is about God coming to live with mortals. It not about mortals escaping the world but rather about the renewal of the world – a new heaven and earth – where the reign of God is complete. Again, it is about relationships.

### **God's Presence in Humanity**

Of course, what we celebrate in our Christian faith is that God did indeed come to live with mortals in the person of Jesus, God's chosen one. Jesus, was a human being like us, but also filled with the Spirit of God such that we can only understand him as God present in humanity.

It is for this reason that we focus on and contemplate the life, ministry, death, and resurrection of Jesus, because he demonstrated for us what it is to be a human fully in touch with God – and the experience changed the world. What we have come to understand is that each one of us carries the image of God, each one of us is a child of God, each one of us matters to God.

God's presence among us is what we affirm when we come to the celebration of Eucharist - as we do in this service. In it we recount the story of Christ and offer the ordinary things of bread and wine and ask that God might bless them and return them to us so that we may commune with the presence of Christ.

It is a similar story about us. We offer ourselves and ask that God might bless and transform us so that we may become the people that God wants us to be. The Christian life is one of a process of transformation, a process of conversion, a process of blessing leading to a moment when we enter the heavenly banquet and the fullness of God. But most importantly, it is a process that is experienced in community because it is about relationships.

Life and death are part of the interconnectedness of our common humanity – we are born, we live, we die. What we do between birth and death is over to us, and things tend to thrive when we are conscious of our relationships with each other and with God.

As we give thanks for Richard's life, we remind ourselves that he is a person of value to God as much as he is to us. Richard is one of the blessed ones, called to be part of God's Kingdom both during his life as well as at the hour of his death - when he entered more fully into God's world.

May Richard 'inherit the kingdom prepared for him!'