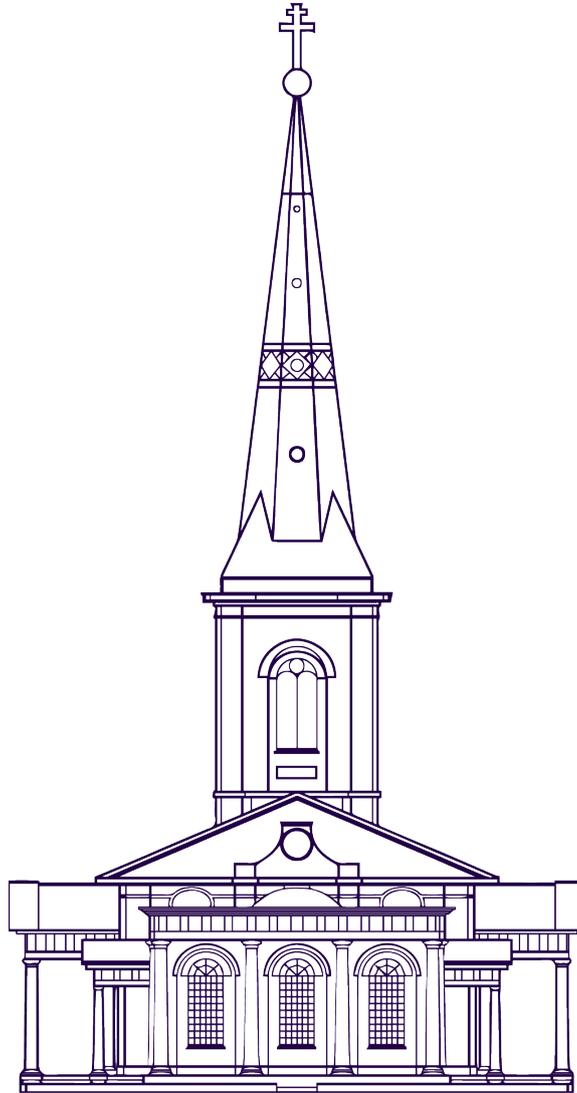


**ST JAMES' CHURCH, KING STREET,
SYDNEY, NSW**



**HOLY WEEK AND
EASTER SERMONS
2020**

The Reverend Catherine Eaton

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Catherine Eaton is an Anglican Priest and Spiritual Director.

Born in Sydney, much of Catherine's early faith formation happened through St Thomas', North Sydney, where her father was organist and choir director.

Catherine initially trained in Social Sciences, and worked as a Community Worker, for much of that time as a Parish Community Worker, first through Anglicare with the parishes of the growing Macarthur Region, and then with St Alban's, Epping.

In the late 1990s, Catherine moved to Melbourne to complete her theological studies at Trinity College.

Following ordination, Catherine was fortunate to spend most of her years in Victoria on the Mornington Peninsula, first as Vicar of the parish of Sorrento and Rye, and then at St George's, Red Hill. Immersed in the diversity and beauty of the environment and engaged in the search for something deeper evident in both church and local communities, these years offered Catherine opportunity to continue her explorations in spirituality.

Catherine moved back to NSW in 2015, and now lives in the Southern Highlands where she offers Spiritual Direction, runs a couple of contemplative groups in her home, and assists in a couple of local church communities.



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4. Beatrice Bruteau – ‘The Holy Thursday Revolution’, Orbis Books, New York, 2005
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[Translations vary but for an accessible guide to Julian see Veronica Mary Rolf – ‘An Explorer’s Guide to Julian of Norwich’ IVP Academic, Illinois 2018]

PALM SUNDAY – 5 April 2020

Readings: Palm Liturgy – Psalm 118.1-2,19-29, Matthew 21.1-11.

Isaiah 50.4-9a, Psalm 31.9-18, Philippians 2.5-11 & Matthew 27.11-54.

When I first began preparing for this week, the sky was brown, a sickly orange glow muted the landscape, the air scraped at our throats and lungs, black leaves fell from the sky, and the 'Fires-Near-Me' App pinged far too often. Our minds were full of images of yellow-clad firies, so small against the towering walls of flames.

We'd just celebrated the incarnation, the birth of the child, Emmanuel – God with us, born into ash and smoke.

Then weeks later the rains came, the greening seeming to happen overnight. The luminous new growth made bright our hearts, and puddles appeared where once was dust and ash.

We took a quick breath... and unfortunately inhaled something worse.

The rawness of the months before had left us more vulnerable than we realised.

In spite of the tragedy which the fires brought, we could still localise it, hold ourselves at a bit of a distance from it, those of us not directly affected. We could watch it on TV unfolding its terror, and feel genuine horror and compassion for all those, people and wildlife, affected. And we could be generous because we hadn't lost everything.

But then there was the smoke – spreading way beyond the fire zones, obliterating the skies, and stealing the air. Many more of us felt vulnerable. But here was a clue for what was to come. Like the smoke, the virus, this unseen intruder, is no respecter of boundaries. And unlike the fires, we can't spot it on a map and say – 'there it is'. We can't detect it till it has taken hold. Insidious and hidden...compared to this even the smoke was a local affair.

Vulnerability is more our natural state than we care to admit.

Some of you may have heard Brene Brown's TED talk on vulnerability. She says vulnerability flares with our inability to predict and control our lives, with our capacity to be hurt.

But she stresses that vulnerability is necessary for creativity and growth. Vulnerability is essential for connection, a truth we recognise in the incarnation.

Today as Jesus makes his way towards Jerusalem, we see him make a choice for vulnerability, for the sake of a greater love.

Over this week Jesus will not only show us how to live with our vulnerability, but he'll draw us further into his own, and into the greater Love which depends upon it.

Over this week we'll also meet numerous characters who will reflect back to us our own patterns of facing vulnerability...or resisting it.

Holy Weeks past have left us with memories of a familiar story, of immersing ourselves in meaningful liturgy and soul-searching music. We may have identified with characters, grieved with Jesus, or touched into our own deeper longings for something we might not even be able to name. Whatever wisdom we may have gained from Holy Weeks past continues with us, supporting and sustaining us. For we enter this Holy Week strangely absent from it. The church is empty except for a few. I look out upon your invisible faces, your hiddenness from my sight, feeling your wonderings at this strange time.

Together this year we're invited to become vulnerable to Holy Week in a new way, to be led more deeply into its movements and spaces, its meanings, its possibilities, removed as we are from the usual supports. This week of absence and separation, will offer us new perceptions of ourselves, and perhaps a deeper seeing into ourselves as the Body of Christ.

But back to the story.

Today the branches and cloaks are spread before Jesus as he enters Jerusalem on a beast of burden, at eye level with the ecstatic crowds about him. There's something exciting and riotous about this moment. The dramatization of Zechariah's prophecy would have been clear to most.

According to Matthew's telling of the story, there have been careful preparations for this event.

The steady plod of the donkey seems to mirror the steady intention and deliberate focus of Jesus.

As the people raise their voices and their hopes, Jesus would already be seeing the shadows building, waiting to launch themselves with fury once his true purpose was known. He would have seen the religious authorities muttering in the background.

We cannot know how much Jesus could foresee of what lay ahead, but he knew enough, and that the end would not be pretty.

Behold your king comes to you, humble and riding on a donkey.

The crowds believe their time had come, this figure riding into town, bringing with him the promise of liberation and an end to their waiting. Surely now God would reveal himself in power, finally ushering in his long-awaited kingdom.

But things are never quite what they seem.

Jesus comes to this week fully conscious of what he is setting in place. He has made a choice for vulnerability, and hands himself over to the dynamics of fear and the illusions which have so determined humanity's course through history.

Jerusalem is in turmoil as he approaches. News of his coming would have already spread.

But from the opposite side of the city, an imperial procession is emerging. Pontius Pilate, riding with his train, to be present in Jerusalem for the start of the Jewish festival - 2 realms facing off - 2

different value systems, 2 different sources of authority, 2 different ways of dealing with vulnerability.

Matthew leaves us in no doubt that this was a chosen moment, a carefully orchestrated event. The confrontation was beginning – the man alone on a donkey walking towards the centre of the city, another man, accompanied by the symbols of worldly power, coming from the opposite direction. No wonder the city was in turmoil. No wonder the question – ‘Who is this?’

And tagging along with Jesus – the hopefuls, trailing their dreams that this might be the long-awaited Messiah, the one who would usher in the ultimate reign of God.

The clash of powers could begin.

Today we have also heard Matthew’s passion story, reminding us where we’re heading, and the encounter between Jesus and Pilate, which lies at the centre of this story. And Pilate, thinking he’s in control, asking a different question – ‘What shall I do then with Jesus who is called Christ?’, this object to dispose of as he wills.

But he does a curious thing. Rather than acting on his own authority, he hands himself over to the will of the crowds.

Pilate is stuck, caught between his duties as governor, the energies of the crowd, and the unnerving presence of the man standing before him. He has become vulnerable in this complex situation. Whatever he does, potentially will come back on him. Pilate is not in control at all.

And as we all so often do, to avoid making a wrong decision, to avoid taking responsibility, he washes his hands of the whole affair.

A quite different matter for us when hand-washing is the responsible action! But it’s all in the meaning.

In trying to avoid his own vulnerability, Pilate becomes more vulnerable. However, we are ahead of ourselves.

Jesus has entered into this week, leaving himself exposed to the forces gathering around him.

Yet, we have a clear sense of a man whose vulnerability is not a sign of weakness, stupidity, naivety or submission. Neither do we see a victim.

Rather we see in Jesus, steadily walking into town on his donkey, as the winds of crowd fervour and confusions swirled about him, a man so grounded in himself, so centred in his inner wisdom and integrity, so secure in his relationship with God, that he could invite an external vulnerability for the sake of a deeper purpose, handing himself over for the sake of the greater wholeness, for the sake of Love itself.

Whatever happens to him, he knows that all is ultimately held by the Father, and his life is held in that love. His trust in that greater presence makes vulnerability possible.

Over this Lent, I know some of you have been reading Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who also showed what it meant to offer himself to vulnerability for the sake of a greater love.

While at this point we're not being asked to put our lives on the line, we are currently being asked to adopt the vulnerability that comes with self-isolation and economic challenges, for the health of the whole.

It seems to me that vulnerability is our true nature. There is an essential vulnerability built into all creation.

It's what connects us to each other, to our world, to our environment at every level, to our inner lives, to God. It's about the air on our faces, the leap of our heart when we see someone we love, the pain in our toe when we stub it on a rock, about the fear in our gut when our job is threatened, the warmth we feel when a baby smiles.

Vulnerability is the basis for our connectedness, our receptivity to our world. It reminds us we are not autonomous, independent, enclosed and isolated individuals. We are bodily creatures, born to live and to die and everything in between, through the receptiveness of our bodies.

And, as this virus has shown us, there's a porousness to our lives, whether we like it or not - regardless of the defences and protections we put around us. We belong to each other and to our world and to God in ways we so often fail to recognise.

The events of Holy Week speak to us of vulnerability – those who gave themselves to it, and those who resisted it, and the consequences which flowed from both. Jesus shows us this week how to live with our vulnerability, how to offer it up wisely for the purposes of love.

The palms have been laid down, the man, the donkey go before us.

May we give ourselves to this week, become vulnerable to its movements, so that with Jesus the vulnerability of God may be made known in us.

HOLY MONDAY – 6 April 2020

Readings: Isaiah 42.1-9, Psalm 36.5-11, Hebrews 9.11-15 & John 12.1-11.

I heard recently of an incident where the bullies won. The bruised reed was broken, and the light from her dimly burning wick almost went out. I don't know how long before the fire of her life and the flame which burnt in her heart will be rekindled.

We move too fast and demand too much to give time to tenderness, and generosity of heart to the bruised and the wounded who need time and healing, to the unproductive whose passion has been stifled, to the fragile and the slow, to those who don't give as good as they get, to those who know silence, and those who don't keep up in the race to wherever it is we're trying to get to, to those who

aren't loud enough or clear enough, who can't immediately give an answer for themselves, not to mention those who don't look right.

What do we fear that we need to push aside the vulnerable and trample on their dreams? What do we think we need so much, that it seems right to make others smaller, exclude them from our space, rob them of their power?

Enter tonight Isaiah's servant figure – revealing a reverence for life, a tenderness, care and respect for the vulnerable, born of delight and informed by the Spirit. One who comes with faithful persistence seeking justice on behalf of the earth, one whose voice does not jar in the silence, but whose presence reveals the new things and the wisdom of God.

Enter tonight Isaiah's servant figure, who our hearts immediately recognise, because he is what we so sorely lack.

The bullies seemed to be winning, the raised voices and the street fights, the faithlessness of politicians, the injustice multiplied and the longing of the coastlands, the weeping of the earth, the bruised reeds breaking, and lights going out all over the world.

Until now perhaps, when we discover none of us are immune to vulnerability. The virus has come, leaving no border uncrossed and saying, 'your fragile humanity potentially makes you mine for the taking'.

Tonight's gospel takes us from the public outpouring of excitement and confusion of yesterday into the intimacy of a domestic setting, an enclosed world, perhaps like many of us are experiencing at the moment.

Yesterday we watched such a servant-like figure enter our world, in humility and clarity of purpose, the steel in his bones, even as he chose the path of vulnerability.

Tonight he is with friends in a place familiar to him, a place of relative safety from the crowds with their curiosity, and the religious leaders whose fear would be his death. John's telling of the story names 5 characters, though probably others are present.

First there is Martha, serving, and in a way, holding the space for everything else that is to happen. Unlike in Luke's gospel and the story of her impatience, here we sense a Martha who is more grounded and, in her own way, alert to the moment and doing what was needed.

Then there is Lazarus sitting at table, no doubt still coming to grips with his own recent encounter with death, and what his fresh encounter with life might mean.

Then Mary, at the centre of the story, approaching Jesus with costly perfume in hand, kneeling at his feet, anointing them, and wiping them with her hair, no doubt breaking many taboos.

Then there is Jesus who has entered into this action, willingly offering his feet to receive this extravagant love, this symbol pointing to his approaching death, and making it all too real.

Then there is Judas, perhaps just arriving on the scene, bringing a jarring presence to this moment of grace.

Yesterday, we witnessed Jesus make a choice for vulnerability, exposing himself to the furies of others, and to the refusal of vulnerability in the world about him.

Tonight we witness Jesus make another choice for vulnerability, but this time it finds its place in a poignant tenderness.

Mary has offered herself to this moment, bringing out the riches of her household, but even more, putting before him her very self – her love unhidden in this action. She has crossed boundaries of social propriety and gender expectations, her uncovered hair damp with the perfume, and stained with the dust from his feet.

Jesus has also offered himself to this moment, recognising Mary's insight into what is happening for him, and treasuring her compassion, as he faces down the terror no doubt rising up within him. Unlike Peter's resistance to Jesus' touch, which we will witness on Thursday, Jesus willingly extends his foot for Mary's touch.

There is a disconcerting intimacy here, a mutual vulnerability that brings everything unbearably close.

In this small scene, it seems to me, we become aware of what we are all called to – that mutual self-giving, shared vulnerability, humbling of ourselves before one another. Mary and Jesus model something for us tonight which is critical to our continuing life and the future of our planet, a way of being that gives and receives, a mutual recognition of the value and essential vulnerability of the other, and the shared reality we hold in that.

But I am ahead of myself. For then there's the Judas factor. Judas has barged in on this scene, demanding answers, and with his own judgements, offering answers to questions that aren't being asked, and missing the truth before him.

The absolute sacredness of this scene is disrupted, broken into. Judas could not recognise the significance of the moment, hold his silence, and simply let it be.

Instead, he rides in over the top of it, and tells everyone that the money would have been better given to the poor - on the surface a noble sentiment, but comes with the arrogance that says the poor are other than us, to be done to, an arrogance that gives to suit its own purposes.

Regardless of whether Judas was a thief or not, he reflects the more transactional and dominating relationship we have with our world.

Unable to recognise the sacredness of things, unable to keep silent, unable to let be, and unable to be vulnerable to our reality, we instead impose ourselves on our world. Instead of the mutual self-giving and shared humility we see in Mary and Jesus, we take what we want and hold it to ourselves, we judge and divide ...we turn life into a series of transactions between competing forces.

There is instead, a beautiful unity in the image of Jesus and Mary – held together by their shared knowing, shared pain and grief, shared love, shared vulnerability, not just in this moment, not just in what lies ahead for both, but in their shared humanity, both leaning in towards each other, humanity stripped down to its essence.

They reflect the oneness, the essential oneness built into all creation: a oneness within creation, a oneness between creation and our Creator, a oneness within and between ourselves. Our failure to live within that reality, our need to divide up and dominate our world, to resist our essential vulnerability, is failing us.

The Judas model is failing us.

Jesus and Mary model for us a deeper truth – in their mutual self-giving, their offering of themselves to this sacred task, in their shared humanity, stripped back from all its external protections and ego, they reflect the profound pattern that emerges throughout the scriptures of God's self-giving to creation, God becoming vulnerable for our sake, and drawing us into a relationship of mutual, self-offering love..

While there seems nothing particularly good about the virus itself, perhaps one of the gifts in this crisis is that we will rediscover our basic vulnerability, that vulnerability essential to our humanity and to creation itself. Maybe we will learn we are not independent, self-sufficient units, whose survival depends on having enough toilet paper and Panadol. Maybe we will discover again our common humanity. This virus is no respecter of borders or races or religions.

But as the fires began to do, perhaps it will also remind us that we are not independent of the rest of creation. This unseen visitor, the bug that has begun to take up home in so many, has arisen it seems because of our distorted relationship with creation itself.

Perhaps as Mary knelt at Jesus' feet offering him of herself and of her abundance, as Jesus offered his foot to receive this grace from her, exposing his own human frailty in that moment, as they together anticipated a burial, that heralded too much to contemplate at that time, perhaps it is time for us to discover our own call to humble self-offering to each other and to this earth, and to offer ourselves also for the receiving of grace, and to discover in that a truer way of being.

HOLY TUESDAY – 7 April 2020

Readings: Isaiah 49.1-7, Psalm 71.1-14, 1 Corinthians 1.18-31 & John 12.20-36.

I don't know if you've ever fallen – there's nothing quite like that full body shock as the road, the pavement, the hard unforgiving surface comes up to meet you. Something's bound to give and it isn't going to be the road, speaking from experience after I tripped and broke my wrist last year.

I felt incredibly vulnerable as I sat in the gutter, holding back the tears, and wondering what to do. My self-sufficiency was shattered, and I became aware, not just of the distorted wrist looking back at me, but some deeper stirrings that needed attention.

In tonight's gospel Jesus speaks of the grain that falls into the earth, and in its dying, bears much fruit. The significant difference here is one little word – the seed that falls into the earth. The earth also needs to be receptive to the seed, vulnerable enough to embrace it. There is a mutuality to the process. I fell onto the road – there was nothing mutual about it – there was no give, no softening, just the crash.

This year we have seen too many images of the hard cracked earth of Australia, where the seed can only lie dormant on the surface, until the rains fall and the soil is softened to receive the grain, which in turn can then release itself into the earth's embrace. The vulnerability must be mutual for the connection to be made.

Throughout John's gospel we hear reference to the hour, the hour that is coming, and Jesus' hour which had not yet come. Until now. He has completed the work the Father entrusted to him, and the earth is now prepared to receive his ultimate self-offering. His hour has come.

The strange appearance of the Greeks on the scene, desiring to see Jesus, signals that Jesus' ministry, confined largely till now to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, is about to have effect for the whole world, the global community for whom Jesus is about to offer his life.

Jesus then addresses those gathered around him, speaking of the grain and the dangers of our self-protective ways. As he prepares to let go his life for the sake of life, he calls his followers also to relinquish their tight grasp on their lives.

It seems to me a word of wisdom for our day. As we hold our distance from each other, and regard each other with suspicion, as we compete for supplies, as our fears escalate and our confusion compounds, as the future becomes less certain. . . .the danger is we will increasingly harden the barriers around us, harden our hearts, and close not just our doors but our eyes to our common humanity.

Jesus' words are not about being foolish in these times, but about choosing the vulnerability of self-isolation for the sake of the greater good. It is about learning to see each other with new eyes as one like myself. It is about letting go our heightened tensions and reactive behaviour to simply acknowledge – yes, we are all in this together. We cannot predict or control what will happen, and we may be hurt in some way by it. It is our shared reality and our shared vulnerability, which asks of us a loving acceptance, a refreshed compassion, and for us who have faith, a trust in the greater Love which holds us.

As Jesus did. 'Now is my soul troubled. . . .and what should I say – 'Father save me from this hour?' No it is for this reason I have come to this hour, Father glorify your name.' Jesus here reveals to us

something of his own inner turmoil and the troubling of his soul. In these few words Jesus names his disquiet, his fearful anticipation of what is to come.

Jesus is not facing his upcoming trials with stoic denial or some inner disconnection. He names his true feelings, acknowledging and experiencing the struggle within him. He felt fully his inner agony.

But he goes on – yes, this is how I feel, but I will not let it deflect me from the greater truth into which I am walking. I will not let it steal my integrity. I will not become less than I am because of it.

Jesus knows the ground within him that will hold his anguish, the ground of faith, the ground of his own integrity.

This is not a prayer for rescue, but rather a moment of deep clarity. This is the hour that everything has been leading to, when, John tells us, God will be glorified, and Jesus will be glorified in him.

The voice which comes from heaven confirms Jesus' words, not for his sake but for the crowds who mishear and misunderstand. Perhaps they reflect our own struggle to make sense of this for ourselves. This confusing hour when the glory of God and what Paul refers to as the 'foolishness of the cross' somehow come together to undo the forces of evil.

We are beset by paradox here – the falling of Jesus will be his lifting up, his vulnerability will reveal his strength, his death will be his glory, his isolation will be the gathering of all people into the oneness he shares with his Father.

As he points out, this is not just his hour. This 'now' is also the critical moment for us, the moment when we too will be exposed – in our truth or our illusion, in our generosity and self-giving or in our fear and greed, in our trust in the greater reality that holds us or in our petty preoccupations.

I cannot help wondering if this virus will indeed be the softener this world needs, the breaking open of the hard lines which separate and divide us. While we have a long way to go, and nothing is clear, even the loosening of the grip on the anticipated budget surplus and dispersing that into the community, suggests that the lines of our lives are already being re-drawn.

Our shared vulnerability can work for us. But human nature is what it is.

We were all shocked a couple of months ago to learn of the murder suicide of a young family in Brisbane. While we can't know what was going on there, Jess Hill in her book 'See what you made me do' wrote of 'humiliated fury' - when someone cannot face their sense of shame and projects it out in violence onto the one seen as the cause of their humiliation.

When we cannot face our inner struggles and the vulnerability that goes with it, too often it ends up leaving others more vulnerable.

When the church refuses to face its shame and tries to avoid the consequences of its abusive past, it leaves its victims more vulnerable.

When we take more toilet paper and supplies than we need, we leave others without.

When tormented asylum seekers come to our doors, bringing their vulnerability to us, our own vulnerability is evoked. So we harden our borders and our hearts, adding to the trauma of many.

And we discover as I did in my fall, that when there's no give too much gets broken.

This virus is already revealing our common vulnerability, and that, like the seed and the soil, it is only in acknowledging that, and learning the ways of letting go for the sake of mutual self-giving, that we can find the way to life together.

While vastly different in expression - domestic violence, church denials, toilet paper wars and antagonistic borders - these things all come from the same place – our fear of being vulnerable.

Fundamentally we are not in control of our lives, but we can choose how we respond to the vulnerabilities that come to us, how we will respond to the virus and its consequences. It won't be easy...but that's how it is. This moment in our lives and our history is perhaps our hour...the moment when God can be glorified, not in the drama unfolding, but in how we begin to rediscover our truth in and through it.

It is the path of Jesus which we are called to follow this week – to accept and value our vulnerability, and when necessary to give ourselves to it.

Because it is only in the moment which is here and now, that we can live our fullest lives and discover the presence of the One who has not only been here before us, but who is present with us in it, and indeed who holds it all in a greater reality, a greater love.

That is what Jesus knew as he walked towards his cross and his hour of utmost vulnerability.

These days call us to something deeper, something truer, something more substantial, inviting us to enter into our vulnerability, and find Love already present there for us.

HOLY WEDNESDAY – 8 April 2020

Readings: Isaiah 50.4-9a, Psalm 70, Hebrews 12.1-3 & John 13.21-32.

We've come now to the middle of the week, as Jesus and his disciples gather for their last meal together. The Passover, in John's telling of the story, is yet a few days away.

Jesus is troubled in spirit. There is disturbance in the air, the shadows are stirring, and night is just outside the door.

Last night Jesus spoke of his troubled soul – that deep inner anguish which goes to our core, that sick, existential dread. In John's gospel that was Jesus' Gethsemane moment, that moment when

his internal struggle gave way to a new resolve, a deepened commitment to the hour which had come for him.

Tonight things are different. Resolved and centred in himself, Jesus' sensitivities are tuned more now to the externals, the human factor, his intimate friends who still do not know him, nor do they discern the energies at play, or the terror which lies ahead. His attention quickly focuses on the one whose choices would force his destiny.

'One of you will betray me.' Jesus' statement breaks in upon his disciples reclined around the tables, leaving them perplexed. Who could it be?

In response to Peter's gesture, the Beloved Disciple inquires of Jesus.

Surprisingly there is no reaction from the disciples, and things move quickly now to the central moment in this story.

Jesus clearly describes what he is about to do. There is deliberate intent here as he dips the piece of bread, and gives it to Judas, who receives it.

In Middle-Eastern hospitality such a gesture can be seen as a mark of honour, a gesture towards a particular or favoured relationship. Perhaps in this act, Jesus is offering one last gesture of love to Judas in the hope he might refrain from his intentions, one last opportunity.

But this seems more than that – it is hard to miss the Eucharistic anticipations here in the dipping and the giving and the receiving of a piece of bread.

Can we see here some foretaste of the reconciliation which Jesus will offer his other wayward brothers after the resurrection? Is it possible that, in spite of everything, this morsel of bread dipped in the bowl is some sort of guarantee for Judas that even he will be drawn into the heavenly feast, that he too will be kept for eternal life?

But there is something more even here. Jesus hands Judas the bread – and Judas receives. There is a coming together of hands, extending towards the other. It is a moment of shared vulnerability, a critical moment for them both. Jesus is not rebuffed – there is a hand extended in offering and another hand extended in receiving. Perhaps at that moment of giving and receiving something could have changed, something broken open in Judas at the touch of Jesus, the look of his face, the gesture and the offering.

We know those occasional moments at communion – moments we are all missing in this present time – the giving and the receiving of the bread, the body of Christ – the touch, often the look, the receiving and opening to it. Something can change in us, a shift, a breaking through, an emotion, an awareness.

It is when sometimes people tear up, in that moment of intimacy and encounter – that moment when the bread lies before us in our hands. In the receiving we become vulnerable, the connection opens to us, not just between us and the one distributing the bread, but between us and all that the bread

represents, the Christ present to us, the whole of creation symbolised in its material substance, and the love which makes meaning of it all.

In this exchange we know we are not separate, we are connected, we belong, and we know our deep need of something, even if we cannot name it.

But for Judas this is the moment of risk – the moment of greatest vulnerability, when maybe even he was aware of that slight tug at his heart which could have undone him, an anxiety at that intimate exchange, a sudden self-doubt, a sudden knowing of love as Jesus looked into him.

As Judas prepares to hand over Jesus' body, Jesus hands over something of his body to him, an offering of reconnection. And maybe it almost was possible. There is power in the giving and receiving of bread, enough to shake the foundations of our souls.

Judas receives the bread.

This is the pivotal moment. In fact, not only the central moment of this night, but the central moment of this whole week. Everything seems to circle around this exchange of a piece of bread, everything has led to this point and everything follows from it.

It is one of those slow moments where eternity holds its breath – will the reconnection happen or will it be severed? This moment will never come again.

How many moments in every day do we make those instantaneous choices, automatic choices, to receive the other or to close off, to see or to turn away, to allow ourselves to be vulnerable to the other, to ourselves, open to whatever that moment will bring?

Judas receives the bread. But it is only after this we are told that Satan entered into him.

It is easy to say some external force entered him and got the better of him. But it seems a strange de-humanising of Judas.

It seems to me the satanic moment happens within us when we slam the heart shut, harden our eyes, stiffen our backs and lose ourselves in our own resolve, the moment in an instance when almost unconsciously, the shutters come down and the shadows take over. The separation is made.

Judas becomes an instrument of the powers of darkness because he closed down his moment of vulnerability, rejected the love, and severed the connection.

While Jesus' path was already set, how it unfolded was still open. If Judas had become vulnerable to the bread and the one who gave it, perhaps this passion journey of Jesus might have looked a bit different. Certainly things would have been different for Judas.

However, betrayers seem to be an inevitable presence in our stories.

This virus seems to be an all too present betrayer of our lives – but could it, like Judas, even through the horror of it, bizarrely be putting us onto the path which calls us?

We have probably all experienced betrayal at some level, that painful realisation that the one you trusted has, wittingly or not, undone some aspect of your life or your sense of yourself.

And perhaps some of you have been a betrayer. I have.

Years and years ago, I betrayed someone. It was unintentional – my actions had the opposite effect of what I intended. But in my inability to even contemplate I might have been complicit in what happened, I became a very angry young woman. It was easier to blame everyone else.

Everyone else therefore became more vulnerable because of my inability to acknowledge my own truth.

As Judas pulls down the shutters on his own vulnerability, Jesus' vulnerability is compounded. When we refuse the connection, when we harden our hearts against the other, against love itself, when we refuse to be seen for who we are, and hide our deepest truth, chances are we leave others more vulnerable.

Victims of racism, homophobia, or domestic violence and abuse, are so because we cannot live with who we are, vulnerable creatures intimately related to creation and to the One whose life is at the heart of it all.

Only as we become vulnerable to the truth of ourselves and our reality, open to the reality of the other, can the reconnections be made.

Only as the church opens itself to the realities for those abused on the church's watch, those we have betrayed, can we begin to make a path for healing for them and for ourselves, for a restoration of the connections.

Jesus could hand himself over to the path before him, to the consequences of this betrayal, because of his utter trust in the Father's love and presence. And from that greater love he could extend a hand to Judas in spite of it all.....and then simply say to him....do quickly what you have committed yourself to do.

The vulnerable moment has passed, the choice has been made. The betrayal of Jesus has begun.

Judas' betrayal of himself has also begun as he hands himself over to his own shadows and to the darkness of the night.

But even as he goes, John reminds us again, that Judas had received the bread, as if in this there is a hidden hope, this little guarantee that maybe he too will know that forgiving love that the risen Jesus will offer to those other disciples who chose their own means of betrayal.

MAUNDY THURSDAY – 9 April 2020

**Readings: Exodus 12.1-4, 11-14, Psalm 116.1-2, 11-18,
1 Corinthians 11.23-26 & John 13.1-17, 31b-35.**

At the heart of all Christian life is the call to service. It is why all ordained ministry begins with ordination to the Diaconate, the servant role.

A few months ago I attended an ordination – for Deacons, and waited in vain to hear some reference to servanthood or self-sacrificial love. However, the emphasis was on the missional work of preaching the word. While this is important, it felt like we had skipped a step, forgotten something essential.

Far from a calling to humility and self-emptying, it seemed we were just adding layers of ego to the church, and possibly to some of the candidates! It felt a world away from Jesus' action in tonight's gospel.

And also from the example of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who died 75 years ago today at the hands of the Nazis, living out his call to self-dispossession, and becoming vulnerable for the sake of love.

Tonight Jesus takes the towel and washes his disciples' feet, an image embedded in Christian consciousness. In this action, Jesus upends the usual dynamics of power and status which filter through our daily life.

Jesus has gathered with his disciples. His hour has come, and there is a traumatic separation ahead. Love will be tested, humanity will be challenged, and meanings will be lost.

Darker currents continue to move things forward to their ultimate end.

Tonight we gather in a context of intimacy, of love, and a tender holding of humanity. We have moved inside away from the crowds, and this time is for 'his own', Jesus' particular companions, the ones he has loved, with an enduring love.

Tonight he takes this love to a new level.

Taking up the role of a slave, Jesus leaves his place at the table, removes his outer garment, ties a towel around his body, pours water, takes a foot, washes it and wipes it dry. When all are done, he returns to his place.

A simple action, 7 steps, reminiscent of something he's done before – when in the incarnation, he left his place with his Father to step into our space, to touch our lives, putting aside his divine embodiment, and binding to himself our human flesh. He came to us as the water of life, tending those he met with healing and compassion, wiping away the grime from their lives. Then having completed the work entrusted to him, he returned to his place with his Father.

So what does tonight's action mean for us? As Christians we are quite good at taking the towel. Our commitment to charitable service is one of the pillars of our society. But sometimes we miss a few steps along the way.

Jesus gets up from the table, leaves his place, and moves into more open space where he can reach the disciples feet

As church, perhaps we are not so good at leaving our safe places, our positions, our secure worlds of belief and Christian culture, not so good at stepping out into the open spaces where we can become vulnerable to others, and know life from their perspective.

Yes, we have a commitment to the poor, to justice, to redress for victims of abuse, but all too often it seems we want to offer these things while remaining safe behind the table, and indeed ensuring the table remains in place.

Then Jesus takes off his outer garment – the robe that hides his nakedness, exposing the flesh that will tomorrow be torn and pierced.

Perhaps one of the biggest challenges for the church today, and for each of us, is simply to be real, to put aside our false egos and self-protective identities, so that more of our God-given humanity can be revealed.

Jesus takes a towel and ties it around himself.

Jesus comes to show us how to be more human, not to separate us from our humanity in ways the church has so often sought to do over the centuries.

He then pours the water, provides the resources needed.

We are generous as Christians and as Christian charities. We give of our resources, but it seems there is a greater call in this. Maybe we are not called to give our lives as Bonhoeffer or Jesus did, but there is a depth to our lives that we too often guard, holding back its riches from a world crying out for substance in spirit as well as material goods.

Then Jesus washes the feet, with attention and care, fully present to the person before him.

How often we fail to see each other, to give people the sacred attention they deserve. We are good at doing for people, but sometimes we fail to actually behold people in their own deep humanity and vulnerability.

Perhaps as the virus enforces our separation from each other, we will learn fresh ways of perceiving each other. Stepping back gives us new perspective, allows us to relax the defensiveness which often accompanies our interactions with others, and maybe lets us see people more for who they truly are.

Jesus wipes the feet dry, taking the leftover water and grime onto the towel tied around him.

We too are not separate. The lives of others impinge on our own and choices we make impinge on the lives of others. As we are painfully learning, the interconnections between us are more than we know.

When all are washed, Jesus returns to his place.

We too need to know the place of our deepest belonging, our truest home. All the tasks in this foot-washing demand a level of vulnerability, of being open and available. But we cannot always live exposed and vulnerable. That would not only be foolish but dangerous. Like Jesus we need to know the place to which we must always return, that heart centre where God waits for us, because that alone is what allows us to choose vulnerability when the situation demands it of us.

On the other side of Jesus' humble service, is the one who receives it.

But of course Peter, the ever brave and ever stumbling disciple, resists.

For it is not just the giver who is vulnerable here, but also the recipient. We all know how hard it can be sometimes to receive, this vague sense of being diminished by it or losing some control.

Receiving requires of us a vulnerability, an openness, a letting down of the defences.

So what is the vulnerability Peter is resisting?

First, as Jesus kneels before Peter, he gives Peter his full attention, regarding him totally as one to be loved and revered – regardless of past and future mistakes and misunderstandings – indeed regardless of present confusions and calloused feet.

He takes Peter's foot – as if it was his own – there is an honouring here, and a focus, upon the foot in his hand and the person before him. It is so hard to let ourselves be loved and seen with that level of attention, to become vulnerable to the gaze of another, to the intimacy of beholding.

Brene Brown suggests that vulnerability is about letting ourselves be seen, really seen.

Secondly, Jesus' action up-ends the normal categories of relationship – the master becomes the slave. We like to know where we stand. There is a security in knowing the patterns of things, the structures which hold our world in place.

Peter was obviously disturbed by Jesus' socially offensive behaviour. Eating with tax collectors and sinners was one thing, but this was undermining Peter's own sense of himself in the social landscape.

But there is more going on here. Upending the social categories fundamentally changes nothing. The master becomes the slave and vice versa, as in many revolutions. It is simply like moving the chairs on the Titanic.

What Jesus is demonstrating in this action is not just unconditional love for Peter, not just a reversal of power dynamics, but a complete shift in our perception of relationships, a recognition of the wholeness and interconnectedness of creation itself.

Jesus takes Peter's foot, the foot that will eventually become part of Christ's Body.

There is a hidden vulnerability here for Peter – an unconscious fear perhaps that he will lose his separate self-identification.

While we are all unique and precious individuals, there is an interdependence to life that we too often forget, a oneness at the heart of things, a truth which our individualistic and utilitarian Western mindset particularly struggles to recognise.

Jesus speaks of his own unity with the Father and prays for his followers to know that same oneness among themselves. Beatrice Bruteau suggests there is a mystical vision here – not something airy-fairy...but a deeper way of perceiving the greater reality in which we dwell, into which each of us is uniquely woven.

The fires and the virus show us we can no longer live as if we are a world of self-sustaining individuals and competing nations.

In the exchange between Jesus and Peter there is a sharing of presence, a mutual opening up to that deeper reality, a one-ness, which does not detract from the uniqueness of either, but rather allows both to be more fully who they are.

'Unless I wash you, you have no share of me' – Peter will indeed share in the dreadful and glorious destiny of Jesus, but he will also take his place in the ongoing Body of Christ, and the fulfilment of love's calling.

Tonight's gospel spells out for us the love we are commanded to embody, love as he loved, love which leaves us vulnerable.

GOOD FRIDAY – 10 April 2020

Readings: Isaiah 52.13 – 53.12, Psalm 22, 1 Corinthians 1.18-31 & John 18.1 – 19.42.

Some of you will know of Percy Cerutti, who trained Olympic runners in the sand dunes of Portsea back in the 50s. When I was priest of that parish some years ago, Percy's wife was downsizing and needed to divest herself of some precious items. She entrusted me with this bronze head of the crucified Jesus, which she and Percy had bought in Paris years earlier and carried with them through their travels, until it was brought to rest in the family home in Portsea. Weighing in at about 3kgs, it was indeed a labour of love.

While it holds a special place in my heart and home, as I have prepared for this week, I have occasionally found myself looking at it, wondering what it might be saying about our faith.

There is a weightiness to this day, a heaviness to our grief, and to some of the profound and unique meaning we put around it. But I can't help wondering if some of the meaning the church has attached to the crucified Christ over the centuries has become a burden increasingly hard to carry around in our current lived reality.

But perhaps we are not quite game to put it down – as there may be nothing to pick up in its place. Today the cross invites us to meet it afresh, to become vulnerable to it, as it puts its questions to us.

The writer of John's gospel was well aware of the context in which he wrote, and the issues facing his particular community - a community most likely of faithful Jewish people who had identified Jesus as the long awaited Messiah and thrown their lot in behind him, unfortunately creating significant tensions with the religious leaders of the synagogue.

These religious authorities are 'the Jews' so negatively depicted in today's gospel. In our world increasingly divided by racism and hatred, including a rise in anti-Semitism, we need to remember these references belong to a particular context, and offer no justification in today's world for division and hatred of any kind.

Meanings matter. Context matters.

Today we watch as Jesus is sentenced – at noon, the 6th hour, the time on the Day of Preparation when the lambs for the Passover meal were slaughtered in the Temple. Then we watch as Jesus dies, his legs unbroken. He is the unblemished lamb required for the new Passover of God, the one who, for John's community, is the perfect sacrifice, the fulfilment of the scriptures and of God's promises.

Indeed John the Baptist had announced Jesus as the Lamb of God right at the start of Jesus' public ministry.

We now carry that forward into our world – every week singing the Agnus Dei – Jesus, Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world - adding meaning of our own, but perhaps missing some of the deeper meaning of the cross which calls to us.

Some months ago, I heard Deborah Cheetham, the indigenous opera singer, speak about writing her Eumeralla Requiem. She could not bring herself to include an Agnus Dei – because so much of the violence and dispossession that occurred during those battles was to clear the land for sheep.

Meanings matter. Context matters.

How then do we encounter this Good Friday event, this ultimate self-giving of one man for the sake of the world, this divinely purposed moment, in meaningful ways for our day?

As John draws us towards the cross, our ultimate destination on this day, he offers us some clues. At the centre of this story is the extended exchange between Pilate and Jesus, as part of Jesus' so-called trial.

Pilate is a man who has probably been in the job too long, met enough messianic pretenders, and had too many debates with the religious authorities of the Jewish world. He knows the limits of the law, and no doubt has no energy for this backyard squabble. He can see through their manipulations.

Yet he quickly becomes entangled. 4 times he goes in and out of his headquarters, his constant movement reflecting his own inner turmoil and indecision. 3 times he says he finds no case against Jesus, yet he is unable to stay with the truth of his own judgement.

Not wanting to upset the Jewish authorities, who might make further trouble for him, he comes up with a plan, and reminds them of the custom of releasing a prisoner at Passover. But this backfires and he is stuck, until they pull their last card, suggesting he could be seen as an enemy of Caesar.

Unable to stand by either the truth he knew in himself about Jesus' innocence or the responsibilities of his role, Pilate eventually hands himself over to the Jewish authorities. His inability to be vulnerable to the truth within him leaves him more vulnerable to the will of others. And his questioning of Jesus reveals Pilate as the one under interrogation.

Pilate wanted answers he could get his head around, something neat to help him take control of the situation on his terms.

However, Jesus is not playing, and refuses to let himself be determined by others.

Like Jesus before Pilate, the cross stands before us, refusing to give us neat answers we can control and possess, but instead questioning and exposing us.

Perhaps a clue for us is the question at the heart of this dialogue. 'What is truth?' It is a question perhaps born of Pilate's cynicism and the emptiness which now plagues his years, a question so sharp and neat, a question with its doors already closed. The question is left hanging as Pilate leaves again, avoiding any further responses from Jesus.

But the question continues to reverberate down the centuries, and in our world of fake news and uncertain ground, Pilate has done us a favour in bringing this question to the fore once more.

It seems to me – the truth we have forgotten is the essential oneness of all that is, in God, held together in love. It is the ground of our being, the ground of all being, and our ultimate destiny. It is what holds us in life and beholds us in compassion. A unity of creation formed out of God's love, by God's one and only Word, and breathed into being by the one Spirit.

The cross speaks of that truth, about the relationship between everything.

For we see in the cross and the man on it, the intersection of all things, the ultimate unifying symbol, drawing together into one point all the dimensions of creation, the heights and the depths, the breadth and all the rest. There is God and humanity, earth and sky, the cosmic reaches and the minutest hidden things. There is love at its fullest holding present with hatred, gathering with separation, beauty and silence and the sounds of life's torments – everything is gathered in that one place. The suffering cannot be separated from the love.

And dare I say when Jesus says – 'for this I was born – to testify to the truth' – so were we all, to testify to and live out of that essential oneness in which we dwell.

Yet we have created a world which values division over unity, competition over interdependence, abuse of power over mutual vulnerability and self-giving. Violence, rivalry and greed have become second nature to us, as we try to avoid and resist the vulnerability which is fundamental to us.

The cross and the crucified Christ upon it stand before us, not to give us neat answers about salvation, but to remind us who we are and the truth we have forgotten.

Our sin is found in the disconnections and exclusions. Jesus came to be where we already are, on the cross of our divisions, to gather us again into that oneness, that wholeness, and the integrity of relationship.

And that is the paradox of the cross – it is only through the path of suffering that we find the redemptive path to wholeness.

Perhaps we are glimpsing that as the virus draws both sides of politics, unions and employers, and others into negotiations.

We know the suffering of living in a world split off from itself and its Maker, consuming itself and tearing itself apart. The fires and the virus are testimony to our interconnectedness and the perils of denying that. When the mutual vulnerability and self-giving built into creation are blocked things go awry.

We stand before the cross, the sign of ultimate vulnerability, not seeking answers to questions of our own making, but to be undone by it, to become vulnerable to it, so we might again become vulnerable to the creation of which we are a part, and to the One who made us and calls us back into that truth and oneness in him.

As Brene Brown said, vulnerability is essential to connection.

Vulnerability is what connects us at every level - with one another, with creation, with God, and within ourselves. And it is the vulnerability we have resisted that undergirds so much of our sin.

Jesus said (12.32) - 'When I am lifted up I will draw all things to myself'.

In Jesus' death, as he is bound to the cross, and the cross holds him, we witness the start of that reunifying, whole-making work of Christ, what Julian of Norwich refers to as the One-ing between God and creation.

But first the abyss calls. We wait now with the cross, with the small community formed at its feet where it digs into the earth. We wait with the not knowing as the cross restores to us our vulnerability. The cross will be emptied of the body, the tomb awaits, and Holy Saturday will begin its work.

Holy Saturday, the silent, hidden, and too often forgotten day, the in-between day which demands our reverence.

It draws us into a different kind of darkness to what we have experienced over these last few days, a darkness where love works its wonders, where the mystery refuses to bow to our small questions. As Wittgenstein said – ‘Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent.’
Let us now wait, without knowing, in that silence.

EASTER DAY – 12 April 2020

**Readings: Acts 10.34-43, Hymn to the Risen Christ,
Colossians 3.1-4 & Matthew 28.1-10.**

Some of my favourite Easter memories are celebrating the Easter vigil on a beach on the Mornington Peninsula, people huddled together on rugs as the new fire was lit, the chill in the air, and the faint glow of pink light emerging through the darkness.

There were a couple of years, through no planning on our part, when as the bread was lifted during the Eucharist, the sun rose over the horizon, sending its path of glistening light across the waters direct to us, as if connecting us to that eternal horizon.

There is a horizon beyond which we cannot see. Today we celebrate the Light that emerges from it, that stretches towards us, and indeed comes to us across the surfaces and the deep unknowns of our lives, the shadows and lights of our days.

We have emerged from the dark, from the empty cross, through the empty tomb, tothe empty church. This is not how it's supposed to be.

This day of ultimate reconnection sees us further apart and separated. Our usual patterns have been interrupted.

How are we to celebrate this day when our world and its virus seem to be holding us back from it, like the stone has been replaced on the tomb?

Yet today's gospel tells us this is the first day of the week, the first day of a new reality.

Mary and Mary have gone to see the tomb. They have come to continue their vigil, their faithful accompanying of Jesus on his last journey. They have watched as he was handed over to death. They have kept vigil with him in his dying, holding the place for love at the foot of his cross. They have witnessed his burial. They come now to hold their prayer at his tomb. They come with their grief and their memories, their questions and doubts, the ache in their hearts and their own emptiness.

Already vulnerable, they are met on their arrival with a massive disruption – an earthquake shakes the ground and ruptures the boundaries between heaven and earth, releasing the angel of God, dazzling them, and fracturing the sky.

We are facing our own earthquake at the moment – the rupturing of our well-practiced lives and the structures which hold our society together. Things are falling apart. The very ground beneath our feet feels unsteady, and the things we have trusted are failing us. It is hard to see where the light is. But I'm ahead of myself.

Quick to work, the angel rolls back the stone . . . and sits upon it. The guards fall as if dead - like the stone, impotent symbols of our false securities, our illusions of control.

The angel reassures the women, and invites them to see the empty tomb. The removal of the stone did not give Christ his exit. The divine action had already done its work and set him on his way.

Holy Saturday is not just a missing day. It is perhaps the most significant. It is the day of transformation, and is rightly hidden from us.

What we do know, is that it is often in the deepest dark, the unknown, formless places that the work of God is done. And that includes the Holy Saturday places in us and in our lives – the seemingly dark and deadening times when we lose our bearings.

The tomb is empty, the work of Holy Saturday has been done, and love has held its course regardless.

'Do not be afraid', the angel tells them, 'but go now and tell his disciples'.

The women immediately run off. We can almost hear their hearts beating in anticipation and joyful trepidation. They have not paused to question, immediately believing what their ears have heard, their eyes have seen, and their hearts have recognised.

But suddenly they are stopped in their tracks by the unexpected appearance of the risen Christ, pulled up by the sound of his voice, their enthusiasm interrupted. Having greeted them, he repeats the message of the angel. It seems an unnecessary repetition. The women had already believed and hurried on their way.

But we all know what it's like to be caught up in the enthusiasm of a new insight, to run off with some bright plan, then later find the energy fading and doubts emerging.

This was a necessary interruption. Jesus greets them – a moment of profound encounter, when the reconnections are made, when they are restored to relationship, when they once again become vulnerable to Love's beholding.

They needed to be grounded in this reality, earthed as it were, as they are brought to their knees, their heads bowed to the earth, and their hands touching the wounded feet, their worship taking hold of what their hearts already knew – a scene of such beauty where God and humanity and earth are drawn into oneness again.

The women now have tangible evidence for their faith, substance for the claims they would be making. Their love and faithfulness through these days have been rewarded.

Jesus reinforces the angel's words – 'Do not be afraid'. The earth has been shaken, reality is shifting, things that once were taken for granted are no longer secure.

Fear was to be expected, but it could not be the driving energy in that recreated time.

Jesus now commissions them as the first apostles, the first to have witnessed his resurrection.

But they are also the ones entrusted to carry to the disciples the reconciliation, the restored relationship the risen Christ holds out for his frightened brothers – not just disciples, as the angel said, but part of Christ's ongoing family, their past mistakes and failures no longer relevant. There is no judgement or rejection, no separation or anger, the relationship is secure, and forgiveness is offered as a hallmark of the resurrection.

But perhaps the most important thing here is the encounter itself. The women had taken hold of the angel's message, and were running off, full of their joyful intentions.

But it was only in the encounter, when they were called, seen, stopped, and brought to their knees, that their vulnerability was reawakened and the reconnection was made.

Only then could they go on to do what they had to do. This was no longer about them, an angel, and a heartfelt mission. The Risen Lord had inserted himself into their path.

It seems to me the risen Christ more often than not comes to us in the interruptions, when our plans are broken open and our good intentions sidelined, when our vulnerability is exposed.

The Risen Christ comes in the fractured moments, to restore us to wholeness of life, to renew the connections between us and God and the rest of creation. He has broken the boundaries of death, transformed life through the dark silence of the tomb, and returned to us, holding out to us the truth of ourselves, the truth built into creation through the one Word spoken by God at the start.

Like Mary and Mary, we have arrived at a rupturing of our world, which threatens to undo us.

While we can't say the virus is good in itself, this little unseen critter has halted us in our tracks, as we run away with ourselves and our planet, full of enthusiasm for our own capabilities.

There is not much light here though, the stone over our darkness seems firmly in place, and most of us probably feel more like the guards, shaken and fearful, with our heads down.

Like the women, we have received the message about what is happening here and what we need to do, though probably our politicians bear little resemblance to angels, and without much joy we have set about doing what we're told.

Dare we contemplate that there may be some encounter with new life in this, an unexpected meeting with the Risen Christ holding out for us the truth we have forgotten, and the possibility of reconciliation.

It may be through our enforced solitude, maybe a reawakening to silence, may be through a new sense of our connectedness, a new realisation of what matters, a new way of seeing – maybe in this

disconcerting time, we will hear a voice that calls us to stop a minute, to reconnect again with who we are, with our vulnerability and our divided selves, with the earth, with God, with the divine Love which refuses to abandon us.

And perhaps in the pausing of our lives, we will find a way to speak love into our fear.

But while we remain victim to this virus, carried along on the currents of anxiety, we can miss the gift hidden in what is happening. While the virus is not a good thing in itself, like the cross was not a good thing, God can use it, Divine Love can use it as we have seen, to bring about the new reality, built on the restored connections and interdependence we know are essential to life.

Perhaps in some hidden way, in the deeper darker reaches of this crisis, the transforming work of God is beginning, behind the stone, where our once-was life has been buried.

We are seeing something of that as communities are built and sustained on-line, as people keep a check on neighbours and assist those more at risk, as health professionals become the new fire-fighters risking their lives for the greater good, as we all practise self-isolation, restricting our own wants for the sake of all.

But perhaps what we need now is to locate this virus in a new narrative. And perhaps we, who are learning to live into this resurrection landscape, can help tell that story, a story of the interconnectedness of our reality, of the precious uniqueness of every part, and of the Christ life at the heart of it all.

A story which tells of the mutual vulnerability and self-giving we need to sustain our oneness, a story which tells of Love coursing through the veins of this created world, a story which says that Love maintains its course regardless, and that often it's in the dark that it works its wonders, a story which holds at its heart a cross, an empty tomb, and the possibility of encounter with love restored in every moment.

In this story even the virus can be gathered up into the whole-making work of Christ who comes to meet us, telling us not to be afraid, but to go and tell the new story – the story of Love that seeks us out, stops us in our tracks, beholds us in our truth, and draws us again into the oneness of life, where death has no claim, and vulnerability is revealed as gift.

S.^TJAMES'
Bicentenary 2019-2024