

## Reflection Notes – 26/2/17

- Geoff Stevenson

### Behold the Wonder – It is (Truly) Awesome

When have you been overcome by sheer awe, wonder or deep delight? What things give you a sense of profound awe and wonder? What delights you?

As I ponder these questions for myself I realise that the things that bring me awe and wonder are often simple things that are freely available to those who will stop and look or listen. Often, I am in too much of a rush or too distracted to really encounter the things that bear awe and wonder, that bring delight. Last week I shared about our little dog, Nimrod, who was put to sleep. As you can imagine, those of you who have had dogs, he has been much on our minds this week and the house is different. I am aware of how he brought a sense of wonder and delight to our lives, as does our surviving dog. Their gentle or exuberant acceptance, their licks or need of a pat, stroke or scratch and their gentle affection are beautiful moments of delight. Through them the mystery and wonder of God is conveyed in ways that words and rational logic can't always communicate. Holding or patting a dog or other pet creates a relational moment that connects us with something deeper, something mysterious and wondrous.

It isn't only animals but other parts of the natural world, the created order. The Earth itself is a living, breathing entity containing billions or trillions of organisms in every few centimetres. The dirt or soil is a living thing that brings forth new life and growth. It breaks down carbon, extracted by plants from the air and fixed into complex sugars by photosynthesis. Carbon re-enters the soil as plants are broken down and this facilitates new growth – food, plants, flowers, trees... When I tread on the grass, the soil or dig in the dirt it feels good. Rotating the compost bin is fun and a look within reveals worms and bugs that work on the material to break it down into that which fertilises and breathes life into soil. This is wondrous. When I pause to look at a flower or tree I see the wonder of this creature, the colour, pattern, the bark and shape and its beauty. I often pause along the Toongabbie Creek to wonder at the trees and plants and the gentle flowing of the creek through its little valley.

I remember watching out over a beach into the ocean some years ago. Out beyond the shore line was a growing storm. The thunder roared all around and out at sea hundreds of lightning strikes buzzed from the heavens to the earth. With a dark backdrop of grey skies and early evening, this lightning glowed and lit up the sky in brilliant wonder. The raw power of the storm was mesmerising and filled me with awe.

I remember the sense I had after my children were born. I had come face to face with one of the miraculous experiences of life. These tiny babies were so real and wonderful, so delicate and vulnerable and yet so wonderfully formed. It is hard to express the absolute awe and wonder I felt in that first glimpse, the first hold. I remember a sense of vulnerability – within myself at having responsibility for this little life and in our babies who seemed so fragile. In this was God!

For some weeks I have had a song going around in my head. It fades and then returns again at all manner of odd moments. It is a spiritual called 'Over My Head'. The words go something like this:

*Over my head I hear music in the air/Over my head I hear music in the air/Over my head I hear music in the air/There must be a god somewhere.*

This morning as I wandered along the Toongabbie Creek the words frolicked in my head. As I thought about them I began to hear other songs – the songs of birds, parrots, Cockatoos, Whipbirds and a multitude of others. I heard the gentle ripple of the creek as it flowed over rocks and along the creek bed. I began to hear the rustle of grasses and bushes as tiny creatures scurried away from me – lizards, insects and other creatures of the bush. I heard the dogs in backyards and the traffic farther away. As I got closer to the school, the delighted play and laughter, squeals and fun of children filled the air. The breeze caused the leaves of tall gums and other trees to flutter and I realised that the bush was alive with music. Over my head I heard music in the air – there must be a God somewhere. Somewhere, everywhere and all around, in and through God was present but I had to stop and look, listen and experience this Divine Presence. When I did, profound awe, wonder and delight filled me.

This week is known as Transfiguration Sunday. It comes from a story we read every year the week before Lent. This year the version comes from Matthew (17:1-9). The Gospel writers each record their own slightly different version of a visionary account where Jesus and 3 disciples climb a mountain. This is all reminiscent of Old Testament Theophany, where God is revealed in wonder, awe and power – usually the power of nature with thunder and lightning. In the gospel story, the disciples experience a vision where Jesus is joined by Moses and Elijah, representing the Old Testament Law and Prophets. Jesus is described as *transfigured* or glowing in radiance. This is reminiscent of Moses when his face glowed in the presence of God. It also recalls the vision of Daniel where the 'Human One' would come and would be radiant.

It is a story that points us into a deeper sense of God's presence as it is revealed to us in the life, person, words and wisdom of Jesus. In his face we glimpse the presence of the Divine. It points beyond Jesus to hold together the story of God and people from time immemorial through Biblical revelation and ancient Dreamtime, indigenous wisdom and natural wonder, inspired by the Spirit of God.

In Jesus, we do experience the radiance of wisdom, holiness, compassion, justice, humility and grace. When we study his life and words and journey with him, we are drawn into a deeper sense of the presence and wonder of God. We learn to see and respond to the world differently. Everything has the capacity to be imbued with Sacred wonder, the presence of God. In the tiniest flower, the colourful bird, the vulnerable pet, a shared meal, the delight of splashing in the water. We are drawn into a state of wonder where we stand before the Divine, the Sacred and are filled with awe. This awe is wondrous, delightful and can overwhelm us. There is also a fearful dimension to it when we come face to face with the brilliance and beauty of Holiness, of God. God can be scary. When I behold the profound size of the universe and the power of suns and nature and the immense forces at work each day and ponder how God holds all this in relationship as Creator, Sustainer and Life-giving Spirit, it is awesome (in the truest sense!). This story invites me to stop, wonder and be still as I encounter God in the ordinary and profound elements of life and death. I am held in wonder before the God who is ever present for those who will stop, look and listen.