

Reflection Notes – 23/4/17

- Geoff Stevenson

Love Enters the Chaos of Life!

There's a story of a grandfather visiting his daughter and very young grandson. They are playing in the living room and the little fellow, a toddler, is full of beans. He is hyped up because granddad is here and he runs everywhere. He starts to show off a bit and do things his mother has been carefully trying to get him not to do. She gives him the warning look and the firm 'no' of a long-suffering mother but he continues. After another warning she picks him up and puts him into his play pen. This way he will not be able to climb on the furniture, run around or touch those things he knows he shouldn't. As soon as she sets him down, his face drops and he begins to cry. The tears roll down his face and he wails. The mother utters a few words and then leaves the room to start dinner. The boy looks at his grandfather with a pleading, begging, helpless look. Caught in the middle, granddad feels sad, feels the little boy's grief and wants to help, to fix things. Surely the little fellow has got the point by now. Surely he doesn't have to endure more. It is breaking granddad's heart watching and listening to his grandson. When mum comes back in he pleads with her but she refuses to give in and gives her father a warning look about interfering.

When she leaves the room again he doesn't know what to do. The boy's distress rises and granddad's does as well. What should he do? He can't interfere with his daughter's parenting but he can't ignore the boy's distress. Finally he makes the only decision he can. He gets up from his chair. He walks towards the play pen and his grandson. The boy reaches out to be picked up but he ignores the outstretched child's hands. Instead of lifting the boy out, the grandfather gets into the playpen with his grandson. The boy comes over and hugs him close. After a bit they play together and the world seems okay again.

The grandfather couldn't fix the situation as the boy wanted so he entered into the boy's situation and sat with him there where he was. Granddad entered the child's distress to be with him and share his isolation.

I thought of this story when I read, again, the story of this week from John 20:19-31. It is the night of the first day of the week, Sunday. The evening of the morning when Mary and the two disciples discover the tomb opened and empty. Mary encounters the Risen Christ who appears to her but not in a state she can hold onto and cling to. The disciples are hiding away from the world. They are in a room with doors and windows locked for fear of those who arrested and killed Jesus; that they would come after his followers. They were hiding in their grief and perhaps shame at having left Jesus to endure alone. In this locked room they were lost in the darkness of life and the confusion and disorientation of grief and pain. They were locked off from everyone and everything.

It was into this locked room, this darkness and crisis that we hear the story of Jesus appearing, materialising in their troubled presence. He offers them peace in the midst of the pain. This is a deep and profound peace that comes from the

one who was tortured and killed on a cross. It comes from beyond humanity, beyond life from the heart of God who stands apart from and intimately involved in human life. The peace that Jesus offers is peace that transcends the powers of this world and their deathly abuse. This is peace from beyond transcending life and death to infiltrate the human life and experience and lift us into a new place. It is peace exemplified by the Reign of God and focuses its power into the depth of human life. This is no empty word or light-hearted greeting. This is the first word of the Risen Christ to those who followed him and constitute his followers, his people. The disbelieving, uncomprehending disciples are confused – no they're flabbergasted, discombobulated, turned upside down and inside out. The grief lurking deep in their being is overwhelmed by the sheer improbability of resurrection, new life and life transcending death – aren't we all??!

As I read I am profoundly moved by the graciousness of this act of Jesus, coming into the midst of grief and pain, fear and confusion to be with them in the hardest moment of life. He doesn't fix everything. There is the very real sense that what was can't be again – the Jesus who walked and talked and taught and healed... won't be in that space. He is different; a body who enters locked rooms and offers peace that transcends everything! What they expected of the future will not be what the future becomes – Jesus in front and them following into some new glorious way. It will be them together and him there but in some other mystical and strange way, a presence in and through and around – a ground of being in whom we live and breathe and have our being.

Jesus breathed on them and said, 'Receive a Holy Spirit...' He then commissions them to repeat this act of peace-giving and restoration to new life in a new world under the Reign of God – whatever that will mean!?!? This act of breathing the Spirit upon them re-enacts the original story of creation in genesis 2 where God breathes the Spirit into the earth-man, *adama*. It is prefigured by the Spirit that hovers over the chaos and disorder in the beginning, bringing forth a new order and life. This act of Jesus is the recreation of a new order in God where we are invited into a oneness in God, to live and find life and hope within the presence and life of God.

The second part of the story contains the well-known story of 'Doubting Thomas'. We are told Thomas was not present the previous week and won't believe until he sees, feels, experiences... In this story we have Jesus enter into Thomas' experience that he may believe. Faith, however, is not constituted in seeing and believing but trusting and we are affirmed to find trust in God whom we cannot see, nor touch nor fully comprehend. It is in the stories, the community, the life we share with others amidst the beauty and wonder of the world that we encounter glimpses of the ever-present God who is with.

It is tis God who enters our 'playpen' and sits with us in the chaos, strife, pain and crisis of life. Not 'fixing' it all up but sustaining us, nurturing us and encouraging us to keep going. It is this love and grace that engenders trust and hope and draws us more deeply into the life of God that is more profound and wondrous than we can comprehend or even contemplate. This is Easter!