

Reflection Notes – 21/5/17

5th Sunday after Easter

God Gives Life, Breath and Everything!

Recently we spent time off the coast of North-West Western Australia. One morning we experienced the sunrise over the Prince Frederick Harbour at the northern end of the Kimberley coast. It was truly spectacular! In the early morning mists we saw the sun gently rise over high and rugged cliff faces. The aqua water contrasted with the red soil and rock in the cliffs and the sun cast a spectacular burst of light across the coastline. The people on the ship stood along the decks as we turned in circles to allow a view of all directions. There was wondrous silence as we took in the vastness of this coastline and the depth of beauty. These coasts are mostly inaccessible except for boat of float plane and remain largely untouched by humans. They are vast, beautiful and awe-inspiring! God was very close!

A friend has just completed a trek to the summit of Island Peak (near Everest), a long-time dream of his. As part of a fundraising group from Westmead Children's Hospital, Bruce and others made the challenging journey. Photos from their facebook page show the unimaginable sight of Everest and the Himalayan Mountains. From my experience in Australia I cannot imagine the immensity nor size of these peaks. I certainly cannot comprehend the challenge that Bruce and the others faced in climbing over 6,000 metres above sea level through freezing conditions and a very challenging, 17 hour journey. The beauty of the world around them was staggering! God was very close!

I become more aware as I grow older of how very close God is all around me. This is not the childhood image of God as the old guy with a white beard and long white robe in the sky. In fact the whole notion of 'God out there somewhere' no longer makes sense to me. God seems close by in the little and big things of life. Sometimes it seems God is very close and very much a part of my own awareness. Other times God seems less obvious to me until I stop and ponder, look and listen and recognise the face of God in the world around me. God is very close to all of us.

I have spoken before of our new puppy, now 4 ½ months old. Nico needs people. He needs the constant assurance of people and wants to lick a hand or face, to be patted and held, to be taken out and walked (or run). This living being is so different from people has a personality and connection to us. In caring for him and our other pets, we are drawn into a deeper place of life where we recognise our interdependence upon the creatures of the earth and the world around us. In our garden there are plants, trees and vegetables. Watching the vegetables grow and picking lettuce, tomatoes, chillies, herbs... and placing them straight into salads and cooking is a wonderful experience. Again it connects us to the earth and our need of the soil, water, air, sunlight... Our regular walks with the dogs around the Toongabbie Creek reveal the beauty and wonder of the waterway, with the vitally important riparian zone (the interface between water and land) the birds and wildlife along the banks. In these places God is very close.

I recently picked up a magazine dealing with quantum physics and how Einstein's theory of relativity has changed so much of how we view the world. No longer is the world a mechanical reality made up of lots of parts. It is a relational reality where

everything seems to be held together in a relational way. Another article I read suggested that God is like a web that holds all things together in relationship. It suggests that God connects everything and holds all in grace. This does not diminish individual freedom of choice or responsibility. Rather it means that everything is ultimately held in relationship and is inter-dependent. The very atoms in my body, carbon, hydrogen, oxygen and so on, have been part of the universe since time began. The star dust literally is the stuff of my body and the physical world we see everywhere around. The molecules in water I drink have been ingested by countless others through history, have travelled through the seas and oceans, fallen from clouds and been part of earth's long history.

In all of this I am not alone or completely independent. I cannot exist by myself without dependence upon other elements of creation. There are unimaginable processes and organisms at work everywhere in and around me all the time. I am completely unaware but also dependent upon them for life and health and the earth's well-being.

In our passage this week (Acts 17:22-31) we hear a story of Paul speaking in the very religious city of Athens. Through their city were idols set out and representing every god they knew or presumed to know. They were all there lest in forgetting one they incurred the wrath of that god. I can only imagine the sight of these images of gods. At the end is the statue of the 'Unknown God' – just in case the nameless unknown god should be offended. Paul is aghast by this display of overt religiosity. There are presumably gods representing all aspects of life from the elements of creation, the provision of food, the gods of power, wealth, conquest/war, love and so on.

Paul was speaking in public places and was invited to speak to the gathering of the leaders and thinkers from the city at the Areopagus, a prominent outcropping of rock where they met to listen to new ideas and debate them. Paul affirmed their religious fervour and then spoke to them of what he knew of this 'Unknown God'. He spoke of the God who made all things, the heavens and the earth in all their glory. He spoke of a God from whom all things come and who gives to the world rather than demanding from the world. This is no tyrannical God. Paul quoted one of their own philosopher poets who says that 'in God we live and move and have our being!' We have our life *in* God. It is like the image of the web that holds us all in relationship – we live in the reality of God who gives life and breath to all. Paul goes on to say that humans reach out for and seek God. There is a yearning in the human heart for this Divine grace, love, life. We seek that deep sense of being that comes from the One who holds everything in love and grace.

Paul says that God is not far from any one of us and holds all things in relational grace and peace. Therefore we ought not think of God as like objects that we cling to, obsess about or worship. The true worship of God is to live our lives in love and justice. We are invited into the freedom of life in God where we find a community of fellow pilgrims to share life and community with. Our eyes are opened to see the presence of God in every place and in each face. The wonder and beauty of God is inherent in the wonder of creation, the joy of friendship and the interdependence we have upon the creatures of the earth and the earth itself.

Paul speaks of resurrection – specifically of Jesus – and how it is implicit in the life of the world because God is present with us and draws us into deeper, richer, renewed life. God is Love and we are invited into the life, the way and the reality of love!