

## Reflection Notes – 2/7/17

*4<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost*

### **The Invitation to Be Love**

There were two stories this week that made me think. The first was the stories of Kirsty Boden, the nurse from South Australia killed trying to help people in the London terrorist attacks earlier in the month. Kirsty ran to help wounded people and was fatally wounded herself. Kirsty risked her own safety and well-being and ultimately gave her life to help others in through terrible act of evil that was unfolding. Whilst most of us would run for safety, Kirsty did the opposite and ran to the trouble where people hurt. I wonder what went through her mind as she ran. I wonder what she thought as others ran away from the terrorists with screams and shouts. I wonder what compelled this young nurse to run into danger to help others. At her funeral people spoke in beautiful ways of this young woman who gave her life for others, whose compassion and courage cost her dearly. There were wonderful tributes to a woman who loved enough to help.

The other story was about Robbie Cornthwaite, a soccer player with the local Western Sydney Wanderers. Robbie, his pregnant wife and young daughter were in Malaysia where he was playing professional football. The team were away at an Asian Champions League match but Robbie was injured and remained at home. Unexpectedly, his wife went into premature labour at around 22 weeks. They rushed to the hospital and the drama ensued. The baby arrived but didn't live. Her lungs were not developed and she couldn't breathe. It was a nightmare for the couple and Robbie had to rush around in a foreign city and organise the have their baby cremated. The experience was deeply painful for them and they felt extremely alone in a foreign world without close family and friends. The deep emotions that the experience engendered swept through Robbie but there wasn't anywhere to deal with it, no-one to talk to. The family left Malaysia when he was contracted by the Wanderers for last season (about 12 months ago). Coming home to Australia was vital for them, to be reunited with friends and family closer by. Robbie speaks candidly of the difficulty he has endured as the father. His wife had more practical support and she was the obvious one whom people offered specific care – after all it was she who had physically endured this dream turned nightmare. Fathers and men do not always know how to speak about these things, especially when they are just that bit removed from the physical realities of carrying a child and enduring child birth. The pain he has felt has been extraordinary and he wants to use his experience to help others.

I can see how his football was deeply affected when he arrived in Australia. It took him a considerable time to settle down and find his way into the team, to get his head together. He is now able to talk more freely about his experience and is seeking to help other men in similar situations deal with and talk about their deep feelings of pain and struggle. It is something that is desperately needed in our modern society where sitting and talking one to one is not always easy or nurtured, a world where screens are the medium many use to communicate and talking about deep and important things in our lives isn't always nurtured or encouraged.

As I pondered these stories and the two ends of human struggle – Kirsty reaching out selflessly to those who are suffering and Robbie in need of someone to stand with him in

his pain – I realised that this is the stuff that makes us more truly human. We often are distracted by other things that are secondary. We are bombarded with ideas of how to make more money and spend it. We are implored to be ambitious and compete with others for the top spot. Our society encourages fear, cynicism, wariness and an unbridled concern for self above much else. It is only in moments of deep pathos or suffering that we find within us the yearning for something deeper and more life-giving than that which money and power can deliver or violence can achieve.

I read a simple part of Matthew's story of Jesus (Matthew 10:40-42). Through the chapter, Jesus sends his followers out to continue his mission which is about responding to human struggle and pain. They are to go into the world of human reality and be a presence of healing and hope. They are to go into places where life is hard and grief runs deep to be a healing presence of peace. They are to be the Love of God in a world that is crying out and hurting. They are to run against the tide and embrace the little ones who suffer, stand against power that abuses and embody goodness and life over death and evil.

I couldn't help thinking of Robbie Cornthwaite and his family isolated from people they know and in a place that is relatively unfamiliar and lonely. His team, the people he knows, are away. His family and close friends are across the ocean and they are enveloped in crisis and tragedy. It is into this world that Jesus' followers were sent to embrace people like Robbie and his family. Robbie's response in wanting to help others is also a connection to Jesus' call.

I thought of Kirsty who did exactly this, running into the midst of pain and evil to bring healing and peace. She was, by all reports, a gentle, loving woman of deep compassion and humanity. On this occasion in a somewhat foreign land she ran into the midst of unfolding evil to help and was killed. It is a tragic and awful story that has brought deep pain and grief to those who knew and loved her.

In the words of Jesus, he warns that love is not without its dangers and that the world will not always deal kindly with those who embrace the way of love. We know this because we have some powerful stories of martyrdom, where people of deep love, compassion and justice have been cut down in the prime of life by those threatened, angry and violent. He warns his followers that the way of life and justice, the way of love and peace will not always be tolerated in this troubled world – Kirsty bears witness to this!

The path into deeper humanity is a path into compassion, justice and sitting with the hopelessness and struggle of our fellow human beings. All of us at some time will be hurting and will experience crisis. These moments strip away the layers of superficiality our society heaps upon us. In such moments money, achievement, power, size of home or value of car or educational, professional or other achievements fall away and we are a vulnerable human. When we stand naked before the world, powerless to change the circumstances of our life, we realise what is really important and what is not. It is in those moments that a human face filled with love and compassion and a listening ear, someone who will get into our black hole and sit with us, is the most important thing we can have. This is what Jesus urges his followers to be and do. They are to share life in all its fullness and pain with each other and to go into the world around and share life deeply with other people. They are to incarnate vulnerable love, grace, peace and justice in the midst of human life and receive such grace from others. This is true humanity, the way of Jesus!