

## Reflection Notes – 23/7/17

- Geoff Stevenson

### **Life Wasn't Meant to Be Easy! (But it can Still Be Beautiful!)**

'Life wasn't meant to be easy,' so famously said former Prime Minister, Malcolm Fraser. He was met by much derisive cynicism from a populace who felt this well-healed Prime Minister was out of touch with ordinary people. What would he know about the harshness of life, living as the landed gentry on his property or in the Lodge in Canberra? What would he understand about the difficulties of life when his government were reducing services and so on to more vulnerable people? So the public rhetoric went. In spite of all that, Fraser was correct and probably knew much of the difficulties of life – as we all do. Life simply isn't meant to be easy.

I am currently aware of a number of people wrestling, struggling and dealing with the hard places of life – recovering from serious illness and surgery, dealing with treatments and therapies for serious illness, living through grief, both new and a little older. Every night on the evening news we are confronted by stories of life and much reveals the hard edges and struggle, whether through poverty, oppression, war, natural disaster, violence, relationship conflicts...

M. Scott Peck in his significant book, *The Road Less travelled* also speaks of the harshness of life. Life is not easy to negotiate. It is not laid out before us on a platter. We do not breeze through life with ease and skill because none of us have negotiated this road of life and living before. It is a journey of discovery, unveiling and reveal in kaleidoscope colours in multi-phonic sound. Brian McLaren in his book, *The Great Spiritual Migration*, reminds us that life from its early moments creates discomfort and pain – ask any mother-to-be. Pregnancy offers a multitude of discomforts and sickness. Child birth adds another dimension and then caring for a new-born is a time-consuming and hard road, as is negotiating a child's growth, maturing and development. There are hurdles, hurts, physical and emotional, and the very real elements of life's difficulty. Of course within all of this are the beautiful, tender and wonderful moments, moments of awe that are sacred and holy. Life is a sacred journey that is mysterious and beautiful but can also be harsh and painful.

As our society becomes ever-more individualistic and people isolated, as communities disperse or become less connected we lose the interdependence and mutual care and support that sustains us. As people become more isolated and painful situations are endured alone, the wisdom, mutuality and love of a true community is lost and more people experience and live longer in the hard places of life. People of power lose touch with the realities of so many people's lives and fail to ensure more vulnerable people receive what they need to cope and to live. As our society becomes more isolated we are also more consumed by fear of the other, the one who is different, whether ethnically, religiously, physically, sexually, socio-economically and in every other divisive category. We become suspicious or condemning and minorities who appear different are isolated and increasingly excluded and abused by a society trying to 'cleanse' itself of anything that strikes fear or uncertainty or threatens the status quo.

When we try to exclude that which is different or seems unsavoury to our palate of life

choice, we begin down a road of persecution, violence and disaster. After all, isn't that what Hitler, Pol Pot, Apartheid South Africa and other regimes have done? Isn't that what lies behind the pain and struggle of our own indigenous Aboriginal people?

The church has also moved down this path far too often – inquisitions, witch trials, burning and excommunicating heretics (or those accused of heresy, whatever that might mean?). Galileo was a brilliant mathematician who, along with others like Copernicus, proved that the earth isn't the centre of the universe but orbits the sun. Even the sun is not the centre of our universe but part of a small galaxy in a very huge universe. Galileo was condemned by the church of his day as a heretic for he dared to challenge accepted doctrine. He was considered a danger and silenced. Placed under a form of house arrest, Galileo was forced to recant his findings and to engage in a process of confession and submission for the rest of his life. He was, of course, proven correct and is honoured as a brilliant mind and courageous scientist who dared to take on the power of the church.

When we try to weed the garden of society from our perspectives, we tend to throw out the good with the bad and often more of the good than the bad. When we pontificate who is good and who is evil, who is right and who is wrong, we often fall into the place missing the point and messing everything up. Life isn't clean and neat, right and wrong true and evil. There are elements of all these mingled together in a complex web that makes life rich with possibility and always on the edge of chaos and pain.

In the parable that appears in this week's gospel (Matthew 13: 13:24-30, 36-43), Jesus tells of a farmer who planted a crop of wheat. but one night an enemy came and sowed weeds amongst the crop. These weren't just any weeds but tares (darnel), which are very similar to wheat. They are very hard to distinguish as they grow and it is only as they reach maturity that the two are able to be separated. The tares have empty head sand are lighter. They stand up straighter. Wheat heads are filled with grain and tend to bend over and hang down. The farmer's workers wanted to cleanse the crop of the weeds but the farmer suggested that they leave them until maturity and then separate the tares into a pile to be used as fuel for the fire, for cooking (even weeds have their usefulness!) and then harvest the wheat.

Perhaps this wisdom is something we need in contemporary life. Instead of spending so much energy in society (and church and other organisations) in separating the wheat from the tares and necessarily messing it all up, perhaps we might live and let live. Stand against evil, of course, but not in violence, hatred and fear-fuelled anger and judgement. Perhaps many of the differences that we feel and observe between ourselves and others are not things to be rejected but accepted and engaged with. Perhaps if we tend to the garden in a positive manner and nurture, feed and encourage that which is good and true, then the whole garden may change and be transformed. Perhaps we spend too much time giving life and voice to the negative and difficult and not enough to that which is wonderful, beautiful and grounded in love.

Life is difficult and a journey that challenges us in many ways. There are always new adventures that promise much but can also come unstuck and deliver struggle. In order to negotiate the path before us we need love! We need the love of one another, of communities that are compassionate, just, merciful and gracious. We need the deep, profound, healing love that derives from God and feeds our deepest being!