



Third Sunday of Easter

8th May 2011

*Acts 2: 14a, 36-41, Psalm 116: 1-4, 12-19, 1 Peter 1: 17-23,
Matthew 28:8-15*

In the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

If we are to understand Easter, if we desire to embody resurrection and to embrace a paradigm of life that is not bounded by death, then we must look beyond the immediate story.

We are reading as our first reading from the Acts of the Apostles instead of the Old Testament. And maybe that simple liturgical change seeks to say it all: a movement from the paradigm of the Old Testament into the “acts” of the Apostles – the life of the emerging Church, the post-Easter community.

Before we explore the actual readings, bring into your awareness your own ‘post-Easter’ experience and be aware that the liturgical orientation of the Church is still in Easter; we are still in the space for embodying the enormity of Easter, to actually ‘get it’. We had forty days building up to Easter, the season of Lent, to get us ready; it’s quite telling that we have fifty days in the season of Easter to embody that movement, ready to acknowledge the gift of the Spirit at Pentecost.

Coles, Woolworths and many others have adopted their own post-Easter movement; their interpretation of resurrection is to shift all the chocolate eggs into one corner and then discount them to a truer representation of their worthlessness. Rather than embody Easter, they have chosen the company profit as a reference point to interpret resurrection. We might take a little more time for our Easter embodying and chose a different prophet by which to seek our interpretation of life in the Easter resurrection.

The Acts of the Apostles gives us a narrative of the emerging Church, an account (not necessarily historical) of the experience and the movement associated with the Easter encounter and the reality of resurrection. So if you want to know what happened, if you’ve got feelings inside you that are making you go off and behave like a two-bob watch, read the Acts of the Apostles. There is a movement associated with Easter; there is a reality associated with resurrection. The Acts doesn’t tell us how people discovered it, found it and lived it; they speak of the process that we will encounter now ourselves. The Acts becomes then a reference text to seek a reflection of our movement – what is the movement of Easter in us, the movement that will touch the core of our being, as a church in the world and individually?

As we follow the unfolding of the narrative in the Acts of the Apostles we can glimpse the reality of resurrection going beyond the confines of the “people of Israel” and spreading to the very centre of the then-modern world. This is the movement of Easter that we may ourselves encounter. Today’s short reading from Acts provides us with some valuable reference points for discerning the movement for resurrection - as if the writer has placed flags in and said ‘look to these to guide you’ as resurrection unfolds for you. In the final verse we hear of his exhortation saying, “*Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.*” – it’s one of the flags. It is a call that is underlined in the second reading which is written in the name of Peter, whereby the movement of Easter is again described in terms that save, this time from “*the futile ways inherited from your ancestors*”. These reference points give us a starting point for our movement of resurrection: we will need to reflect on *this corrupt generation*. We will need to be aware of *the futile ways inherited from [y]our ancestors*. Only in seeing the reality of today, only in knowing ourselves in the futility of worldly corruption, can we be open to the all that resurrection asks of us. If we don’t see where we are, there is no way we can see where we’re going.

In that first reading from Acts we hear that when such a reality was seen by the “*Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem*” they were gob-smacked, *they were cut to the heart*. That’s actually gob-smacked moved up a division. And as we realise that same space that we inhabit in toady’s world, we too shall be cut to the heart.

We next come to the crucial point and it is opened up for us with the response of those who were cut to the heart, because they then asked the question, “*what should we do?*” It is a crucial question in the realisation of resurrection, for it indicates that they knew that something needed to be done; they’ve got an insight that the world does not yet have; they’ve seen the promise of resurrection: “*what should we do?*” They also knew that resurrection requires participation.

And then we have another reference point and it is the key to the door of the tomb. It is to be found in the response to their question; *Peter said to them, “Repent....* This call to ‘repent’, from Acts, post-Easter, is also the opening call in the Gospel of Mark, and the start of Jesus’ ministry in the gospel of Matthew. ‘Repent’ is a starting point, it is a call to beginning, and that’s why I see it as the key to the tomb.

In an odd sort of way Coles and Woolworths have got it right, for in the call to repent we must also put behind us all that is worthless, discount what we thought of as satisfying and look for something more that is the promise of resurrection - not more chocolate, rather more that is true and right and fully alive to the glory of God. The Dick Whittington approach that sees repentance as the action of turning, does not do justice or capture the full sense of the Greek ‘*metanoia*’, from which it is translated. So I’ve borrowed a quote from a commentary in ‘Process and Faith’ (*Jeanyne B. Slettom*) that unpacks it a little:

‘The Greek word translated as “repentance” is *metanoia*, which is more accurately translated as “a change of mind”. The implication is that this change takes place as a

result of what one has seen or perceived. The “meta” part of the word includes the notion of “beyond,” or “outside of.” In a theological context, then, *metanoia* refers to a perception of the world that is so fundamentally different from one’s previous understanding that it results in a complete change of mind—a transformation, a new orientation. When we experience a *metanoia*, we see ourselves and the world in a profoundly new way.’

Today’s gospel gives us the narrative of *Mary Magdalene and the other Mary* immediately after they have encountered the reality of resurrection. It again reveals for us and captures the movement of resurrection: for the two women that movement is summed up in the first three verses;

- They left the tomb quickly – Anglicans don’t do things quickly do they?
- Experienced fear and great joy – they didn’t deny or avoid it.
- They ran to share with others
- They encountered Jesus
- They *took hold of his feet* – as if they’re bringing Maundy Thursday into a new place.
- They received assurance "*Do not be afraid*"
- And they were told to go; ‘*go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me.*’

Three verses, that’s all it takes: all of that movement and energy opening up the movement of resurrection. These dynamic three verses point towards an excitement to a new journey, a new beginning.

By way of contrast in the rest of the gospel we have another narrative that tells of another movement in terms of resurrection encounter. It is the movement in relation to the priests and the assembled elders, the establishment:

- They devised a plan
- It involved a large sum of money
- And some *soldiers*
- And it was designed to *satisfy* and *keep you out of trouble*

A devised plan to maintain the status quo, to create a story with an agenda that diverted the eye from seeing the reality of resurrection. This is the movement that maintains *this corrupt generation*, and that retains *the futile ways inherited from your ancestors*. Here the eggs of Easter are offered, but at a discount, they are rendered as of less worth and the shelves are restocked *with perishable things like silver or gold*, not *with the precious blood of Christ*.

Three readings - providing us with some valuable reference points for discerning the movement of resurrection, all hinged on the crucial call to “repent”, a call that can only be spoken when we ask “*what should we do?*”

And that’s really the sermon..... When I finished it I thought, for some it will be too difficult – let’s acknowledge that. Some will not overcome their fear - let’s

acknowledge that, and others will not yet see the *futile ways*, nor the *corruptions of THIS generation*..... Let's acknowledge that. This is not for everybody; after all it was Saint Peter talking to the "*Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem*". It was St Peter who said Repent....

For those who find this too difficult, this Peter, the unsaintly, exhorts you to support those who do seek resurrection, and if Easter has been put away, if you've packed it up for another year, if you've cleared the rellies out along with the yellow bin, then at least fully embrace the reality of Mothers' Day.

Marie will soon be leaving Kathmandu. The children at the Snowlands school call her Mom Marie, for she is their Mother in so many ways. Her own children are adopted; they call her mother and in turn have adopted children. In the past few weeks I have been in daily contact with the story unfolding. I've been with her and others as they take Agog Rai for surgery that he is still too sick to undergo; as they settle the five Tamang children into a new home and into new schools and so also into the hands of new mums; as we process details of abuse that have emerged via emails from volunteers in the US; as friends gather to look after the children during a police raid that arrested the principal of the school and those running it, (later released); as they seek more money so that a bore can be installed at the school to provide adequate running water, and as they pick up another six-year-old boy from the slums with three breaks to his arm from a drunken father. Here we can see the embrace "Mother's Day".

And nearer to home that same embrace is evidenced. Joan and Michael open their home to Mayom and give him a mother's support; Christabel looks after Noel who's lost his car in a fire this week – 'some mothers do 'av 'em'! There's a roster of people to give Joan the routine of Mother's taxi service; Kim spends hours in the kitchen, reflecting a mother's hospitality in giving, in feeding body and soul; Ruth and Maggie, another team of mothers, do the routine cleaning of our home; Rhonda and another team of mums teach and guide our young ones every week, on Sunday and during the week. Someone described fathers as womb-less mothers. It's a beautiful description, because each and every being has the divine reality of being a womb-less mother - our giving is not to ourselves and the fruits of our womb, our giving is to the womb of creation, to the children of the Divine.

Here at St Paul's we can delight in a post-Easter community of *tomb-less* mothers. Peter, the unsaintly, sees the promise of resurrection, and knows the truth of repentance. He (me) and all of us need to ask one question: "*what should we do?*"

Peter Humphris