

Fifth Sunday after Pentecost 23rd June 2013

1 Kings 19: 1-15, Psalm 42 & 43, Galatians 3:10-29, Luke 8:26-39

How do you approach and/or encounter the three readings we've heard today? They are seemingly quite different: the demon-possessed man in the country of the Gerasenes, Paul's radical teaching that faith is not for those who live by the law, it is for all, and Elijah, fleeing from the King's wife who vowed to kill him before the day is over. These are the readings we have shared; will they give us insight and direction as we prepare for our Annual General Meeting later this morning?

Certainly if we only encounter them as bible stories, then we'll most probably shrug them off and move on to the next sound bite of interest. However, if we explore them in relation to our post-Easter theme of "A New Creation" we might see that what we have this morning are three resurrection narratives, and, as such, they have a lot for us to consider and contemplate.

To explore resurrection, we probably first need to drop the Sunday School versions of resurrection as either bringing the dead back to life, or of life after death. However, as we explore the whole idea of resurrection we will discover the reality of these simple truths. Resurrection is very much linked to our identity and so to the reference points that we use to define or determine who we are. Is our sense of being grounded in the world or is it realised in eternity?

Starting with the first reading, we find Elijah facing his death, or running from it. In verse 3 we see that he was afraid and alone. As the story unfolds, he asks that he might die; and then, under a solitary tree he falls asleep. Already there are echoes of Gethsemane and the Cross. The narrative continues; he is awakened by an angel, a divine presence and manifestation of the Divine Word. He then travels for forty days and forty nights toward the "mount of God", another Lenten journey, which parallels our approach to Easter. Next he spends a night in a cave, the tomb; and it is there that he encounters God. Elijah found no God outside, nor in demonstrations of power, rather he 'heard' God in the "sound of sheer silence"; a place that is most feared by many people.

This first resurrection story gives us an appreciation of a God quite different to the God we have known in the history of the Church. The traditional emphasis about God is one of 'power and might'. And perhaps that emphasis was created so that the Church itself would be seen and accorded with 'power and might'. The crusades, the inquisition, the 'my God is better than your God' approach to other faiths and the colonisation imperative of missionaries are all out workings of this orthodox emphasis

Elijah encounters the Divine in the "sound of sheer silence".

Elijah's encounter is one of resurrection as he is transformed from the power and fear of the sword to the stillness of sheer silence, the very voice of peace. And with that transformation he is sent forth from the tomb, the cave, and returns to that which he previously ran away from.

We will find a similar resurrection story in today's gospel, and might appreciate more fully

how fear inhibits us from participating in “A New Creation”. However, before that we have the writing of Paul offering a radical new orientation, a new way of being and understanding of oneself when alive in the light of resurrection. When Paul refers to “all things written in the book of the law” and refers to those who do “the works of the law” he is referring to those who follow the orthodox religious perspective of life. And in verse 23 he speaks of ‘A New Creation’; *“Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed.”* The tomb of orthodox practice, gives way to the revelation of faith and the new creation of those who become *“children of God through faith”*. Paul underlines the transformation as a change in appearance or identity speaking of those who *“have clothed themselves [yourselves] with Christ”*; Jesus too was changed in appearance by his Easter resurrection.

The Elijah resurrection spoke of a God found in Sheer Silence, Paul speaks of us finding ourselves changed in appearance and identity; it is a radical change that removes our being differentiated; *“There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus”*, no longer refugee and citizen, no longer gay or straight, no longer Muslim or Christian; *for all of you are one in Christ Jesus*; and in our resurrection we are have *clothed ourselves [yourselves] with Christ*

Both Elijah and Paul replace the sword of difference, and the sword of power with the silence and unity of peace.

And so to our third resurrection narrative in today’s gospel, and one in which we might all see our reflection. Elijah, like Christ, found resurrection in a cave or tomb, and Paul, like Christ, was reclothed by the resurrection experience; the *“man of the city”* in *“the country of the Gerasenes”* *“wore [worn] no clothes, and he did not live in a house but in the tombs.”*

Here we see today’s average Australian not wanting the torment of religion or faith and perhaps even further demented as most no longer even think to ask *“What have you to do with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God?”* The man’s nakedness in the gospel shows only the self, there is no identity to be found and no indication of a reference to anything, or anyone but self.

Jesus asks a telling question *“What is your name?”*; when Moses asked the same of God the reply was “I AM”. In the gospel story the man replies; *“Legion”*; *for many demons had entered him*”, reflecting the many faces we all present to the different demands of our complex world, and the many identities we invent for ourselves to hide our deepest fears. Living in fear we create the demons that take us away from the truth of our highest calling, and our modern culture fuels the fears of scarcity, so we take more than what we need in case we miss out, the fear of difference which drives our refugee policy and our fear of death which keeps us entombed in the quest of extending life’s quantity, even though that somehow does little for our fear of unavoidable decay.

In this third resurrection narrative the transformation is from a naked life in the tombs, to being found *“sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind.”* However, the story has more to reveal; Elijah’s narrative reveals something of God in the resurrection process, an encounter with “sheer silence”. Paul’s narrative spoke of us finding ourselves changed in appearance and identity; and this story has something to say about resurrection in relation to the world.

35 Then people came out to see what had happened, and when they came to Jesus, they found the man from whom the demons had gone sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed and in his right mind. And they were afraid. 36 Those who had seen it told them how the one who had been

*possessed by demons had been healed. 37 **Then all the people of the surrounding country of the Gerasenes asked Jesus to leave them; for they were seized with great fear.** So he got into the boat and returned. 38 The man from whom the demons had gone begged that he might be with him; but Jesus sent him away, saying, 39 "Return to your home, and declare how much God has done for you." So he went away, proclaiming throughout the city how much Jesus had done for him.*

Resurrection is our encounter and engagement with the process of bringing into reality "A New Creation". However, the world is fearful of change and threatened by change. Most people want things to stay the same, probably a perspective driven by their fear of mortality. Resurrection IS the very activity of leaving that fear and coming out of the tomb of mortality's enslavement into new life that is clothed "in Christ". Resurrection is not for the dead, nor for those seeking more after death; it is a realised orientation to life - a new creation that births us out of our fears, into a life that is lived in the silence of eternity, and that silence is waiting to be heard over the winds and earthquakes that disturb our sleeping in life's tomb.

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