

Eleventh Sunday after Pentecost 24 Aug 2013

Exodus 1: 8-2:10

Psalm 124

Romans 12: 1-8

Matthew 16:13-20

Before we look at today's readings, I am pleased to launch the St Paul's appeal.... I invite our warden's, Chris J, Rodger P, Joan is away, and also Don/Debbie as a representative of Parish council to come to the front and present the St Paul's appeal.

The three (unrehearsed & unexpected) come to the front and are given the first two verses of the second reading to read out to the congregation....

“I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. 2 Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Thank you

Our wardens and church council members are appointed, set aside by us and for us; they are invested with the ministry of leadership; and as leaders, they encourage, affirm and appeal to us as they seek to guide us into the realization of the 'kingdom of Heaven'.

Today we heard an appeal, St Paul's appeal, from those we have asked to give us direction. We heard, as those in the early Church heard, we heard the appeal of St Paul.

It is a simple appeal, an appeal for us to become 'Christians', and yet it is an appeal that asks a lot of us all:

“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God--what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

It is an appeal that asks that we change; and it reflects a sharing of Paul's own experience and insight as he realized what Christ has revealed; it enabled Paul to grow beyond the confines of his primitive tradition and discover a new creation, a new sense of himself and a new reality for the whole of humanity.

If we are to hear this appeal, and even more so if we are to respond, we will, like Paul need to *“be transformed by the renewing of [y]our minds”*.

We will have to look again at ourselves, our tradition and our sense of place and purpose in the whole scheme of things.

Before that is all consigned into the 'too hard' basket, let's deal with the obvious questions; “why bother?” and “what can I do about it anyway?”

The first reading from Exodus indicates a significant shift in our liturgical year, we've finished reading about Joseph in the book of Genesis and have moved on to the next book, and to the story of Moses in Exodus.

Last Sunday, we left Joseph on top of the world and full of abundance in Egypt. Now, we find that Egypt has a new king, and the plight of Joseph's prosperous people has dramatically changed....

Peter Humphris

In our sheltered parochial world we are somehow able to pretend that everything will always be the same, but in every moment the world changes, and in each moment we by our doing, and our not doing, are creative of changes in the world.

You'd have to be an Australian politician not to see that changes that are taking place in the world; however each and all of us can be impressively unaware of our part in the creation of change; we are after all, all members of one divine body...

The delightful narrative of "Moses in the bulrushes" is a Sunday school drama that is designed to identify the character of Moses as someone quite special; this is the nativity story for Moses. In the Hebrew tradition Moses is treated much like Jesus in the Christian tradition; worshipped as if it is 'he' that is important and so missing the point of his revelation.

If we read the adult version of the story, we find a relevance that is both contemporary, and insightful for our own becoming.

The rulers and governments of the world fear the power of those who they oppress, control and/or govern. The new king of Egypt fears a change in the status quo in the very same way that our own governments fear a potential change of vote.

What is delightfully illustrated in the Exodus narrative is the ability of individuals to overcome the fear based policies of those who are creative of oppression.

The freedom, the movement out of slavery that the book of Exodus narrates is not something achieved through the magical and divine powers of Moses, rather we see in today's readings how individuals make a difference and change the course of history as prescribed the King, the mother who defied Pharaoh, the sister who watched protectively as the basket floated on the Nile, and Pharaoh's daughter who adopted him. The midwives Shifrah and Puah who earlier disobey Pharaoh's order to kill the male babies...

Much of today's creative activity, around the world is being birthed out of fear, and so the insight of Paul's appeal is still very much relevant for us; *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God"*

In Australia, if we conform to the worldview of our government, we will be afraid of the flood of refugees that come by boat...

However take a moment to consider the reality:

○ 1976-2013 (37 years) Asylum seekers arriving by boat **69,445 (1800/year)**
<http://www.refugeecouncil.org.au/r/stat-as.php>

○ Contrast this figure with the number of spare bedrooms in Western Austral alone:
 Number of Houses = 960,716, Average bedrooms = 3.3, Average occupants = 2.6

"Spare Bedrooms" **672,501**

http://www.censusdata.abs.gov.au/census_services/getproduct/census/2011/quickstat/5?opendocument&navpos=95

○ In WA 109,328 dwellings were unoccupied at the last census

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Today’s first reading gives us an insight into **our** path to freedom, freedom from fear and freedom to realize the Divine promise of abundance; the divine promise to Abraham and to the multitudes that followed after Abraham..

In the second reading, Paul appeals to the early church, to the Christian community and to us, he asks us to know our part in the unfolding of Divine promise. It is not presented as an option , but rather as an act of living in integrity; in his words: *“we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually we are members one of another”*.

Finally in the gospel, we have the example of Peter’s realization, it is not Jesus seeking to resolve an identity crisis, it is an illustration that when we truly see what Christ reveals then (and perhaps only then) we are the foundation, the catalyst for a new creation.

When we see ourselves in relation to Christ, as Peter did, then we too receive the keys of the Kingdom of Heaven; we are opened to the reality of Divine in the world, and we experience Emmanuel, God with us”; an opportunity to *“be transformed by the renewing”* of all that we are.

The power to bind and loose that Peter receives is an authority to interpret that law and the tradition, to recreate, re invent and resurrect the Divine promise with a new integrity, to create tomorrow without the fears of the past tradition. And although it is a gift given to Peter in today’s gospel narrative, we will find in Chapter 18, that same gift is again given, to the whole church community..

Three readings that call us into the freedom of God’s divine abundance.....

Three readings that affirm that we all have a part to play and that we all play a part

Three readings that question everything we do and all that we are.....

*“May you discern what is the will of God
what is good and acceptable and perfect.”*