

Sixth Sunday of Easter 1 May 2016

[Acts 16: 9-15 ;Psalm 67; Rev 21:10-14, 22-22:5; John 5: 1-9](#)

[Easter 6C May 1 2016](#) Textweek

You may have noticed that following Easter the Old Testament reading has disappeared and has been replaced by a reading from the Acts of the Apostles.

There is a deliberate and intentional focus on our contemplation of the reality and realisation of being the Church. The Easter experience is very much one of establishing a new life, a new way of living that takes us beyond the Old Testament understanding of a past tradition.

Today there are some interesting signs of new movement in the readings we've just heard.

The first reading provides an account of the bible's Christabel;

"Lydia, a worshipper of God..... and a dealer in purple cloth"

We hear an account of Lydia being baptised; and might wonder if the writer was intentionally providing a cameo for us to more fully appreciate the enormity of the Easter event and the actual reality of the whole Easter process.

Lydia was the first person (at least recorded biblically) who was baptised in Europe; and that gives us a sign of an important change in the whole religious understanding.

The Old Testament tradition narrates an understanding of a tribal God, the God of the Hebrews; it tells of a theology that is peculiar to one given (or chosen) people and it is very much centred geographically in Israel, even more particularly in the temple in Jerusalem.

What Jesus revealed, and what is still revealed in the process of Easter, is a new understanding that went beyond the primitive confines of the Old Testament.

The story of Lydia illustrates an outward global orientation; the tribal God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who lives in the temple at Jerusalem is replaced with a much fuller understanding.

And Paul, one who was very much formed in that Old Testament tradition becomes the one who takes this new understanding into the wider world, and so opens up for exploration a new theological context.

Lydia illustrates a break with the tradition of the previous patriarchal church leadership, and the purple cloth identifies her as one who moves in the circles of the rich and powerful.

It is a very simple cameo and yet in its simplicity just about every constraint of the Old Testament disappears as a new understanding takes its place

The second reading from Revelation also provides a new illustration that breaks from the past; it provides a dreamscape of a New Jerusalem; a reframing of all that is, and so also an insight into life after Easter.

In this new post-Easter landscape the Old Testament twelve tribes are acknowledged, but only as an entry point; in describing the New Jerusalem we're told

"It has a great, high wall with twelve gates....., and on the gates are inscribed the names of the twelve tribes of the Israelites".

And the twelve apostles are also given credit, but only, and significantly, as foundations:

"the wall of the city has twelve foundations, and on them are the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb".

But the real break with the primitive tradition of the past is found in verse 22;

"I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb";

that which previously confined God, and that which previously housed God as separate from the people, is no more.

It is very much a new insight, the temple is the Lord, in other words the Divine presence just is, not in temple, synagogue or Church, just "is".

Both the first and second readings describe, or illustrate, real and significant changes that result from the process of encountering Easter

The readings are inviting in us a contemplation of the Easter change that we are actually participating in; inviting us to imagine and to make real a new understanding and a new tomorrow that is truly lived in the Divine presence. The invitation of Easter takes us beyond all that we hold on.

In the gospel we hear the story of a sick man who lay with "many invalids--blind, lame, and paralyzed"; if this was our story, which it is, rather than his story, can we identify the blindness and lameness and paralysis that we lay with ourselves?

The sick man was waiting for someone, waiting for someone else to make him well. he was waiting for someone else to carry him into the water of life..

This little illustration seems to bear a remarkable resemblance to the Old Testament primitive tradition of waiting for a Messiah.

And, it bears a resemblance to the Church's doctrine of a second coming; it also reflects for each of us those times when we expect someone else to fix things for us.

"Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." 9At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk."

And that is exactly what Jesus says to each and all of us.

"Stand up, take your mat and walk."

You can't cross the sea merely by standing and staring at the water.
Rabindranath Tagore

"Stand up, take your mat and walk."

To anyone who is sick and laying with "many invalids--blind, lame, and paralyzed" this can sound like a very harsh ask; and many will be unable to hear these words of life, however the gospel narrative continues, and what we'll find as we look at the whole movement into the New Jerusalem, is that if we can't help ourselves, then the pathway to resurrection is to help someone else.

"Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." 9At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk."

And that is exactly what Jesus says to each and all of us.
Peter Humphris

