

Twenty Third Sunday after Pentecost 23 October 2016

[Joel 2: 23-32 ; Psalm 65 ; 2 Timothy 4: 6-8, 16-18 ; Luke 18:15-30](#) from Vanderbilt

[Proper 25C / Ordinary 30C / Pentecost +23 Oct 23, 2016](#) from Textweek

Today's sermon comes to us via Air Asia; the readings for today have been with me in Nepal, Malaysia, Indonesia and here in Australia; and when we travel with the readings we can so readily appreciate that they can be seen from very different perspectives, and they can also illuminate for us very different landscapes.

In some mystical sense, the 'Word of God' travels; it moves around within us seeking to bring our diverse natures into one divine and universal wholeness.

The readings might initially take-off in our in our mind and send us off into unforeseen tangents of thought; equally they might call in to pick us up at home, seeking to take us beyond where we like to sit, seeking to move us to an appreciation of life that transcends the borders and limitations of our everyday world.

The readings can be seen as ticket, passport and boarding pass; they give us the ability to move, they give us permission to enter into new places and new experiences and they enable us to board, ready for take-off, with fellow travellers who also seek to explore beyond the comforts of home.

Joel, as we see from today's first reading, was not as well travelled as we are; in fact, he's never flown with Air Asia.

His worldview was far reaching and yet he had a limited understanding and a limited experience of 'the universal' and so he projects his understanding of the beyond into the hands of God.

For Joel, it is God who 'pours down', God who 'repays', God who 'sends' and God who 'deals wondrously'. Joel did not have an appreciation that "the Word became flesh", and yet he somehow reflects a deeper knowing that years later was brought to light when Jesus extended the list of destinations with his unveiling of a new theological travel itinerary.

Joel reflects a post-Easter insight; he imagined a destination as yet not advertised,

"You shall know that I am in the midst";

Joel like Jesus brought God into the very manger of humanity.

And in discovering 'God within', Joel sees a new landscape in which

"my people shall never again be put to shame";

and that phrase is the only phrase repeated in the reading; it is therefore being underlined for us so that we might reflect in the same way as Joel reflected.

So we are asked to consider our "shame" and to become aware of all that comes into view when we look at our disgrace, our embarrassment, dishonour and humiliation.

Much, in fact most of what 'shame' can teach us is related to the smallness of our worldview, for 'shame' is one of the ego's most powerful masks; it disguises for us the truth of a shame that we all share.

Joel looks beyond the ego mask of 'shame' and he sees;

“your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions. 29 Even on the male and female slaves, in those days, I will pour out my spirit.”

It is surely shameful that we do not prophesy, shameful that we no longer dream dreams and see visions and shameful that the Divine Spirit is not to be found poured out for all, even *on the male and female slaves*.

In today's world we even have Royal Commissions to expose our shame, and yet once again this is just an illumination of the ego mask that disguises our truest reality.

The underlined 'shame' in the reading from Joel is that we think we are really moving and really travelling when we have our ticket, and our passport and boarding pass; however, revisiting our Air Asia analogy, our truest shame is that we are passengers on life's journey when really we are called to be pilots.

Most will sit uncomfortably on the plane and trust in a pilot they do not know; unaware that Christ, the airline CEO invites us to fly the plane and to take others with us beyond the confines of worldly gravity...

When we are invited to fly, it is a shame, our shame, that we choose to be passengers.

The gospel provides us with two dialogues that might also help us in our contemplation of 'shame', the first life truth fits so well with our call to fly:

“Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it.”

When we think of a child's attitude toward travelling with Air Asia, we will smile as we know they will imagine themselves as the pilot of the aircraft; talk to a child about flying and it's doubtful they will talk about being a passenger, rather they imagine not just being a pilot, but will go even further into the realms of superman flying experiences.

What a shame that we see ourselves as passengers; and perhaps our only imagination is for an unexpected upgrade to first class.

The second dialogue in the gospel also fits neatly into our travel analogy, for it is about 'leaving behind' and 'letting go'.

It begins with a visit to the travel agent;

"Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?",
and then the travel itinerary is made clear;

“Sell all that you own and distribute the money to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; then come, follow me.”

What a shame that we cannot let go, and it is to our common disgrace, our embarrassment, dishonour and humiliation that we are unable to share our wealth and to bring life to others as we journey through life.

If we remain passengers on life's journey then we will remain uncomfortably in our seats, we will take off and leave behind only the hungry, the poor and the refugees; hoping that the pilot will take us to some splendid place with a nice hotel; heaven.

However, if we face our shame, and take the controls in both hands, leaving behind, our self-interest and worldly investments, then we can truly fly and we can make true the Air Asia company logo;

“Now everyone can fly”

Today's readings invite us to begin a new journey, and to make it a journey that is open to all; the readings ask much of us, for they ask us to be the pilots of that journey, and yet they affirm that such a task requires only a childlike imagination and outlook.

On my travels I carried another book with me, and its subtitle is “Einstein's unfinished revolution”; I'm not suggesting that for reading but the title adds another element to our contemplation of today's readings; the book is called “About Time”.