

# Fifth Sunday after Easter 14 May 2017

[Acts 7: 55-60; Ps 31:1-5, 17-18; 1 Peter 2: 11-25; John 14: 1-14](#) Vanderbilt  
[Easter 4 A May 14 2017](#) Textweek

Arriving back in Perth Saturday morning there were very real echoes of Kathmandu in the air; the air pollution index hit a maximum of 90 units in Perth on Saturday which is ranked as 'moderate' and on the cusp of being 'unhealthy'; in Kathmandu for the same period the index reached 172 units, and that seems to be an accepted norm in Nepal.

Whenever we travel to other countries and cultures we are reawakened to the reality that there are so many different ways of living; and maybe we are also awakened to the idea, the possibility, that our version of life, our pattern of living, might look very clean on the outside but is not necessarily all that we make it out to be.

We might also be aware in our travels of those things we hang on to, and in many cases that stops us from fully embracing the very real differences that we encounter.

Today's readings can very much highlight the formation of life patterns and might perhaps ask us to more fully embrace some of the changes that are also being illuminated.

In the account of the stoning of Stephen in the first reading we see religion at its most corrupt; Stephen spoke about change, the change that had been revealed through Christ; but

"they covered their ears, and with a loud shout all rushed together against him."

The religious fundamentalism and intolerance that we see in groups like ISIS, Family First, the US evangelical lobby, and so many other groups that make up the majority of vocal Christians are all patterned on that early self-righteous model, and even today such groups continue to 'cover their ears.

Perhaps we are guilty of the same as we hang on to our traditions without more fully discerning and embracing the possibility and potential for change.

The second reading we could almost write off as irrelevant to our culture, for it is addressed to "aliens and exiles", and in our culture we very much seek not to embrace such groups.

However the reading does illustrate the need to be discerning in our reading of these ancient texts.

In its context it accepts the idea of slavery and of beating slaves as a normative part of life; and then seeks to shape the teaching of Jesus to accommodate such a norm. We have moved on from that pattern of life, and that's important to acknowledge for humanity is always evolving and moving on; and being who we are, we also will seek to shape the teachings of Jesus to validate and verify our version of life, rather than being open to a new a new and different way of being.

Within the text there is also the essence of Christ's teaching; and in the middle of the reading we find the shortest sentence that speaks clearly before being misshaped to fit in with the norms of the day;

"Honour everyone."

And it is worth noting that the following sentence

"Love the family of believers"

comes after, and so is secondary to the first

"Honour everyone."

The reading also carries a message that is then echoed in the gospel:

"For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps."

The early church very quickly changed the reality of this teaching, for instead of "leaving [you] an example" the church reframed Christ as the atoning sacrifice; it promoted the idea that Christ had done something for all humanity and for all time rather than 'leaving an example for us to follow'.

The gospel is so full of theological insights, and yet at the same time when we look at the Churches interpretation we soon come to see how much of this has been either misunderstood or significantly distorted to serve other purposes.

The first six verses are very common as a reading for funeral services; and that illustrates a hanging on to a past tradition of resurrection as being a possibility after death; the Gospel is a message for life in the present and is not pointing to a simplistic transfer into heaven when we die.

And of course we will all be aware of the evangelical understanding that comes from the last of those initial verses;

"Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

This text alone has been responsible for wars, crusades, intolerance, fear and discrimination but only when read as an inclusive formula that says only Christians are right.

The reality of the text is that no one comes to God, no one realises the reality of the Divine, except through following a different way of way of life as illustrated through and by Christ; and if we scan the world for those of any and every faith that seem to lead a holy life, we see that they regardless of faith are imitating that which Jesus illustrated for all.

The second part of the gospel deserves another hearing, for it is yet to be heard by the institutional Church; and these are the key revelations from the text:

1. If you know me, you will know my Father also. From now on you do know him and have seen him."
2. Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.
3. Believe me that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; but if you do not, then believe me because of the works themselves. 12 Very truly, I tell you, the

one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these,

These three statements completely reorder the understanding of God; no longer the unseen Old Testament God, the God whose face one could not look at, the God on high who resides in heaven.

Here Christ reveals the Divine, the Word made flesh; and contrary to popular belief; this change of life pattern is one that is not restricted to any one person, rather:

“the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these”;

Christ-likeness is our true reality, and is the true reality of all humanity.

Being ‘Mother’s Day’ we might also pause and acknowledge that we have just skipped through three patriarchal readings and that these texts have been further embedded in our culture and our faith tradition predominantly by men only.

Having read that;

“For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you should follow in his steps”;

we might pause and consider the iconic example of Mary, the “God-bearer”; and if societal norms were more balanced then the Icon of Mary might be more fully embraced for in the teachings of today’s gospel are we not all called to be like Mary, to be bearers of God and birthers of God.

And so let me finish with a story of two mothers encountered in the last few days.

Sonam has just completed high school in a school that will only help her through to year 12, she came and saw Raja and me last week with a well prepared letter asking if we could sponsor her to do a Hotel management course at college for then she would be able to get work and support her mother and siblings; her father either died or walked out when Sonam was just a baby.

Sonam is already seeking to be the ‘mother and father’ in her family, she comes like Mary wanting to bring to birth a life for others.

Yesterday at breakfast one of the women at the table, without knowing about Sonam, told me that she felt she should increase her ‘giving’ to IGWR and asked if there was a girl who needed to be sponsored; she wanted to ‘mother’ another child..

These two God-bearing stories are so delightful by their auspicious coincidence; and they also serve to give a greater depth to “Mother’s Day”.

Perhaps we can consider what Christ said when mum turned up because he had forgotten mother’s day:

“<sup>46</sup> While he was still speaking to the crowds, his mother and his brothers were standing outside, wanting to speak to him. <sup>47</sup> Someone told him, “Look, your mother and your brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you.” <sup>48</sup> But to the one who had told him this, Jesus replied, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” <sup>49</sup> And pointing to his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother

and my brothers! <sup>50</sup> For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”” [Matthew 12]

Today we rightly honour our mother's, and more than that we honour all who bear life and bring life to birth. Humanity, men and women alike, are called beyond the literal generational confines of honouring; and we are all called to realise the Christ-like potential we have to bring to birth new life, and to be God-bearers in a world that so easily forgets or distorts its true understanding of life and the Divine nature of all life.

Amen

Peter Humphris