

Sunday 5 March 2006: The First Sunday in Lent

Acknowledging (Where we are)

Readings: Genesis 9: 8-17; Mark 1: 9-15

I feel privileged to have been invited to be the first of the external preachers to preach into your Lent theme 'Building Community'.

The theme that I am picking up this morning is that of Acknowledging – acknowledging where we are. In doing so I am testing the hypothesis that Acknowledging is the first of the five smooth stones for building good community.

Dairmuid O'Murchu, the Catholic theologian suggests that while not often knowing what we mean by community, 'it seems as if a fundamental aspiration of humankind is being articulated: the desire to relate more closely and intimately with a wider circle of people.' We hear the call for the community of nations', the community of faith, the community of the church, a rural/urban community, the local community. The desire to build community.

Acknowledging is the process of naming our realities, facing our favourite fears, the fears that prevent us from acknowledging our divine freedom to choose who to be.

At the Grubb Institute, being in the wilderness is a necessary part of the discernment of God's call to us individually and collectively, to join with God as co-creators, active in the world.

In the wildernesses we are confronted with who and what we are, evaluating how successful are we being at doing what we say we want to do?

The picture feels bleak. Our world is torn apart by war, poverty and terrorism. We live with an illusion of scarcity within a world of abundant resources. We experience breakdown in our families and our communities. Trust in institutional leadership (politics, churches, faith groups, business leaders) is low and our confidence in the capacity of political, economics and social institutions to act in the interests of all people is shaken.

The unstoppable evolution of our search for meaning as human beings has produced new ideas, experiences and challenges. We face experiences that call into question the validity of the stories we tell about ourselves. Deeply held beliefs and assumptions are being tested and found wanting. Across the sciences, there is mounting evidence for the fact that everything is created out of relatedness, sustained through relationships and thrives on interdependence.

We struggle to develop new stories that contain and explain our experience of what it is to be human.

When we look at the world we live in we are faced with the question – are we really living as co-creators or are we just surviving.

I would suggest that the temptations we face in the wilderness are those that take us away from choosing to be and to act on the experience of our Oneness in Christ. Instead our differences are the source of conflict as we compete rather than celebrating that in Oneness our magnificent unique differences are resources for the repair, healing and transformation of our world.

Ironically we fear acknowledging our Oneness and to serve the Devine creative energy that is our experience of the living God active in the world. We fear really living having given up the illusion that we are individuals and faced our mutual accountability for a shared future, freely choosing to repair, heal and transform our world.

In the wilderness Jesus found who he was, his identity in the voice that spoke of him being my beloved son with whom I am very pleased. It was this relationship that enabled him to say in the Temple I must be about my fathers business. It enabled him to pray Abba Father if it be possible let this cup pass from me in Gethsemane. Also Father into your hands I commend my Spirit on the cross.

When Jesus goes to Galilee preaching the Message of God: “Time’s up! Gods Kingdom is here. Change your life and believe the message.” (Peterson) The Cosmic Christ revealed the deepest mysteries of the universe and spoke an uncompromising truth about the unity of all people. Passing Simon and Andrew, and then James and John he issued an invitation - the invitation to work for a new world order, the Kingdom which O’Murchu describes as ‘marked by right relationships of justice, love, compassion and liberation. It is new in its essential nature, global in ambience and practical in its application. It includes and transcends the religious dreams and hopes of all humankind.’

Last November, 48 people gathered for eight days to form a temporary institution with a Director, Participant staff and participant members. Our task was to study the real time lived experience of what happens when people gather and struggle to take individual and corporate responsibility for what we were contributing to creating, making decisions as to the action we would take to repair, heal and transform.

We came from 23 countries, from five continents, Leaders in Politics, Business, Health, Education, Churches. We were Hindu’s Christians, Jews, Muslims, atheists, Bahrists, Buddhists. , We were testing a hypothesis that faith and belief are resources for the repair healing and transformation of the world.

Over the eight days we had many assumptions about the other shattered. We had experiences where interactions between people generated hope. We saw courage in the face of fear and uncertainty. We discovered connections with each other never imagined; we found that engaging in the moment with the other brought new depth of meaning and disclosed new ways of being. We experienced faith as personal but not private, shaping our different ways of being interconnected.

Within this part of the complexity of the world we inhabit we saw a glimpse of the whole, saw patterns emerging, new conversations enabling new stories to emerge making both sense and meaning from our experiences.

This reflects what is happening in many places all over the world. There is a growing critical mass of people determined to struggle with the awesome responsibility and joy of being inextricably linked to every other part of creation. Knowledge developed as part of our divine yearning for meaning is being released from the silos that constrain our capacity to connect. We are evolving; we are rejecting the old cause and effect determinism. People are saying No. End poverty now, Stop the war. There must be another way. The good new is that there is.

Give up survival and choose to LIVE.

Fulfilling our divine yearning for community when starting with the smooth stone of acknowledging opens up new choices and possibilities.

That the community that is formed sees itself as a dynamic living co-creator of the Kingdom, enfolded in the spirit, a community that contains and transforms the fears releasing faith and belief as a resource. A community that reflects something about the whole that it is a part, its Oneness with God.

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