New Life in Christ

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Introduction

This long weekend, we celebrate the official birthday of King Charles III for the first time. Yesterday, a single RAAF F-35A Lightning II flew in salute past Government House in Sydney.

Next Saturday, 17th June, we'll be able to watch on our TVs the annual ceremony of the 'Trooping of the Colour', otherwise known as the 'King's Birthday Parade'. 1,400 officers and guards, 200 horses, and massed bands will march down Horse Guards' Parade in London to Buckingham Palace where His Majesty will take their salute.

Listening to talk hosts on the radio, it seems many people have been referring to tomorrow as the Queen's birthday because that's what it's always been as far as they can remember. Adjusting to big changes takes time and an understanding of the new reality. Perhaps this is especially so in the thoughts and perceptions of those who surround a person who has changed in some way or is saying or doing things contrary to expectations.

On this second Sunday of Pentecost, what used to be the Tenth Ordinary Sunday, we celebrate the new life that we know and that as the Body of Christ we have to offer those around us. When a person comes or is brought as a child to meet God in Jesus, the point of entry to that new life is recognised and celebrated with ceremony. Baptism is the sacrament of sealing our dying to a life of senses in thrall to survival and normal human pleasures only and rising to a life of transcendent meaning and spiritual belonging: a new life.

Matthew 9:9-13, 18-26

Matthew's gospel this morning tells us about some kinds of

real-life experiences that prepare the soul. We, too, may have experienced physical or mental suffering, consequences perhaps of greed, longing for an identity or status, for the assurance of righteousness and worthiness, for there to be more to life, instead of “Well, is that it, then”! or maybe a deep gnawing hunger for love that’s steadfastly faithful, deep and wide enough to swim in freely just as we are.

As we look back over our lives we may see something of ourselves in Matthew, the hated collector of Roman taxes and socially excluded (except of course by other tax collectors and rascals), in the respectable and successful man who’s lost someone dear and beloved, excluded from life with her by death; and in the woman who had probably for most of the past twelve years kept to herself afraid to go out and unable to participate in religious festivals and traditions with her family, excluded from the spiritual life found in community rituals.

But new life in Jesus not only happens by being open to God’s love and faithfulness whether living with the social consequences of having chosen to work in a despised occupation. Or desperate to save a beloved child lost to us. Or suffering an unmentionable disability. Although this is so often the way of spiritual rebirth. But we can also see that in Jesus, spiritual life is an adventure with novel situations testing our faith and not without the hazards associated with quest.

We easily understand that tax collectors, sinners, and those rendered ritually ‘unclean’ by a contagious disease, or smelly discharge would not have been welcomed into a circle of companionship. But sandwiched between social and biological uncleanness in this reading is the encounter which seems odd. Doesn’t it strike you that as Jesus was teaching “For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners”, suddenly a leader of the synagogue came in and knelt before him pleading? Is this irony? Or condemnation of those who are righteous and

respectable? What is this situation telling us? Does Jesus stick to his guns and refuse to do what the man in humility and desperation asked of him? A righteous man, not a sinner? No, Jesus got up and followed him, and his disciples came, too! But let's dig deeper into this. This man, a leader of the synagogue came to Jesus asking him to enter his house and lay his hand on the daughter, who he thought was dead, so that she would live. Now, Nicodemus had come to see Jesus at night, so no-one who mattered would see him. Well, all right, it didn't really matter if people of no account saw him like those eating dinner at Matthew's house. But he asked Jesus to come to his house, enter, and touch his dead child, knowing that Jesus would become ritually unclean by doing so. No wonder he knelt! Like sinners and the ritually unclean, the bereaved leader of the synagogue was experiencing the intense aloneness and loneliness of being cut off. The call of love in hope for the future, and in faith in Jesus, brought him. Above all else, he was as human in his need as the sinners and the unclean. God is just and impartial.

Romans 4:13-25

St. Paul in his letter to the Romans teaches us, as spiritual descendants of Abraham, we have not an inheritance in law, but in faith. We believe that our God as just, impartial, and abounding in steadfast loving kindness towards us, even to suffering and death. Paul put into words what is different about Jesus' teaching from what was commonly understood in his day about our relationship with God and those around us.

If law is broken, punishment is due to enforce it, satisfy it, and restore its wholeness. Its power is based, simply put, on praising what is right and condemning what is wrong. This is aimed to produce obedience as in the totalitarian regimes of today. One who breaks the law is an offender and, if conscientious, knows the pain of guilt and self-loathing.

However, if faith is broken then reconciliation is due to heal

and restore a relationship, whether between God and us, our friends and neighbours and us, nature and us, and even with ourselves. Its power is in the constancy of love, faith, and hope for the future God has for us and which empowers us to reproduce, bring new life to others, just as Abraham and Sarah eventually reproduced and brought many descendants into being. Just as Jesus and so many of our saints and the faithful have done by loving their unloved neighbours.

Conclusion

New life in Christ, like physical birth, is ongoing. Jesus teaches us that in Him we have eternal life, a continual renewal, dropping what once seemed to be or to work and adjusting to the new realities of our era and circumstances with wisdom and courage, both personally and as the Body of Christ. We witnessed King Charles III make such an adjustment at his coronation by doing the previously unthinkable: welcoming leaders of other Christian traditions, and of other major faiths to join in the ceremonial celebrations. With our ceremonial sacrament of Eucharist, we come together like soldier guards, as it were, bearing the flags of faith, hope, and love to salute our God: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, seeing ourselves in our neighbours, loving our common humanity and, ultimately, the life of our Earth in which we and all things share