Witnesses to the Resurrection

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Easter 2 Year B – Acts 4:32-37, Psalm 133, 1 John 1 1-2, 2, John 20:19-31

Children's Talk

When I was Priest in a country parish by the sea, there was a little boy called Selwyn. He was bright and quick on his feet (his daddy was a national-level soccer-player). One Sunday morning, Selwyn came confidently as usual to the altar-rail for his blessing. He was dressed a little differently than usual, though still in his best: he wore his Spiderman costume. And we loved him for it!

Now Selwyn is not an uncommon name in some Pacific Islands. Many people are still thankful to the man who brought them the good news that God in Jesus is not only alive but with us; right where we are. Not only that, but He loves us and always will. All you have to do, the man said, is believe it. It's the Truth. The life and death of Jesus of Nazareth, God's Son, were evidence of the Truth of God's love for the world, for each one of us; and for you. The name of the man sent by his Church was George Selwyn, and he was the first bishop of New Zealand. (1809-1878).

Sermon

On Saturday, Easter Eve, I went for swim, instead of going as usual on Sunday before church. Jim, not his real name was sitting in the morning sun with a pleasant-faced Asian woman. She could have been a recent immigrant as she didn't seem confident about speaking English, but seemed to understand. Jim had had orthopaedic surgery the previous week, was happy with his recovery so far, and grateful. That led to the wonders of living in Adelaide. Together we extolled its

delights: from d medical science, to the space-agency, opera and high culture, sports, and our new Oval overseen by the Cathedral. At that, Jim asked if I was taking Easter services, and as a quick aside to the woman, said, 'Susan's a priest'. He then suggested my sermon should be about being thankful: for living in safety, when elsewhere in the world was suffering hugely, especially from the pandemic. Our exchange then centred on suffering and the person of Christ. He made statements that allowed me to say that Jesus was a victim who didn't behave like a victim; that he didn't repay evil with evil, but in the agony of the brutal, intentional cruelty, and humiliation of crucifixion, he said: 'Father forgive them, for they know not what they do' and the evil done to him was cut off, it couldn't continue to circulate and damage others. The woman was looking at me intently.

John 20:19-31

Christ's appearances and what they meant to the disciples.

Easter Day, that first Sunday after the crucifixion, John wrote that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene. In the evening of that day, Jesus came and stood among the disciples as they were together in a locked room. He greeted them, and showed them his hands and his side. From the marks that the disciples saw on him, there was no doubt for them that this was truly their crucified Rabbi, and if this was their crucified Rabbi standing there among them, then he had to be master over death.

So as to understand what that really meant to these disciples, we need to know how they understood the cosmos. It was heaven, earth and sheol. Sheol was the place of the dead. There was no concept of heaven as dwelling forever with God. The concept of forever dwelling with God, of nothing being able to separate us from the love of God was given to us by those earliest disciples. For one thing it meant that all that Jesus had taught them could be lived out, as Jesus himself had

lived, because it was true, it was genuine, it was a way where God walked too, God walked with them.

In other words, and this is an important theme in John's gospel, Jesus is the Truth. God's Word, Jesus, is the Truth. A couple of years ago, there was an article in the Easter edition of the Weekend Australian. Written by Brian Rayment, QC Advocate for the Newcastle Diocese, the article explored the trial of Jesus before the Sanhedrin (the court of justice of Jesus' people), and the trial before Pilate, the Roman governor. The conclusion Rayment drew is that the charge brought against Jesus was probably not that of blasphemy, but of being a false prophet, a fraud, a charlatan, one about whom no-one could testify to any evidence that what he had taught and said was in any way true or subsequently borne out. This would explain, for example, why the chief priests wanted to change the inscription on the cross from: 'Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews' to: 'This man said, I am King of the Jews'. Under the first title, the King of the Jews is being crucified, under the second title, a fraud, a false prophet, a trouble-maker, is being crucified.

So when Jesus appeared to his disciples alive with the marks of crucifixion, there could be no greater testimony to the truth that God had spoken in the person and work of this man. The disciples saw and believed this truth, Thomas touched and believed, and John wrote these things so that we may believe. What we believe is that the way of God is the way of Jesus, the Christ; that as members of his body we live his risen life; and that in living Christ's risen life nothing can separate us from God. You know as well as I do, that we all share the joys and the sorrows of human life. We have our achievements and our failures, as did the one we call Lord, but we, who believe, who have faith, even if our faith is as small as a mustard seed in a sea of doubt, have the power of life and peace, and the power to give life and peace to others. In fact, ou faith is made complete in loving giving.

At each eucharist, we celebrate the presence of the risen Christ in our midst with the greeting of peace, the broken Christ distributed among us, with Christ alive within us, God sends us out. Like those disciples long ago, we too leave the security of the church, the building and each other to go out into the world with the message of hope conveyed in ordinary words and actions: Christ is risen. He walks with us. Talks with us. Shall we face welcome, hostility or indifference? Like the disciples, we learn not to be fazed by the reactions of others one way or another, some are ready or receptive and some not (God knows!). We know that we are called and sent to show our love for God and our neighbour: to show it in the way we live, and when opportunity arises, telling the truth. Christ is risen! There's nothing to fear. Love is stronger than fear – the fear of being judged by someone who tells you what Christians believe and that's why they're not, but they're 'spiritual', whatever that means! Love is stronger than fear – the fear of being condemned, whether 'trolled' or 'blocked', or our faith overlooked to make us acceptable and socially appropriate to acquaintances, colleagues, neighbours. Love is stronger even than death, so that nothing can separate us from God's love. That's the truth

You see, in the person and work of Christ, our faith deals effectively with the problem of evil, of sin both committed and suffered. We know that it was by people of faith in Jesus Christ that Adelaide was founded and developed. As I left Jim and the woman on Easter Eve, 'Yes,' I said, 'I'd speak of thankfulness!'

So here's to thankfulness for the risen life we share in Christ. Thanks for the way of life we share in Adelaide, in Australia; thanks for the life and work of George Augustus Selwyn, first bishop of New Zealand; and thanks for Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, who loved faithfully and steadfastly in war and peace, his country, our country, our commonwealth of nations, and our Queen. May he rest in the

love and peace of Christ.