

Jesus gives himself to His transforming purpose

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Lent 1: A wandering Aramean was my ancestor...SALVATION HISTORY
dtw

O God of the journey, lift me up, press me against your cheek. Let your great love hold me and create a deep trust in me. Then set me down, God of the journey; take my hand in yours, and guide me ever so gently across the new territory of my life. Joyce Rupp.

Deut 26. 5 'You shall make this response before the Lord your God, "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor; he went down into Egypt and lived there as an alien, few in number, and there he became a great nation, mighty and populous."

"Tell me the old, old story, tell me the old, old story, tell me the old, old story of Jesus and his love." I can still hear the Salvos singing that down Hay St, West Perth in the 60's. Today we begin a journey of rediscovering and reclaiming our roots, roots that go back to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and even before them, to the very loins of Adam and the womb of Eve, our primeval ancestors. From Ash Wednesday to Easter Day we journey with the great Bible heroes like old Abe, Moses, Isaiah, Peter and Paul. We are caught up in THE Story of Salvation History. Alongside this, be encouraged each day in Lent to make sacred space and look at YOUR OWN story of faith and life. All of this will come to a huge climax in the events of Holy Week, and notably an upper room, a supper, a cross and an empty tomb.

A wandering Pom was my father, William. His father's name was William, like his father before him. They were all first-born sons in the Wakeford line. I am not William because I had an

older brother, William, who was still-born during the war while my father, a British Officer, was away fighting. But my son is called William. I am part of a story, and not only that story of naming, but I also discovered when I met my father's sister, then a Mother Superior in a Convent in England in 1981, that I am a descendant of a number of English clergy.

The thing that bothers me about a popular current world-view is that we have to become our own creations, or so it seems. Individualism is rife. For much of post-modern society life is no longer God's gift, now it's a matter of my rights or choice. Once people got their stories from their parents, or their church, or town and they lived them as best they could. Now, choice is freedom – or is it? I believe that one reason why loneliness, alienation, depression, low self-esteem, suicide appear to plague post-modern life is that this way of thinking can make us all strangers -strangers without a story, strangers without connections or roots. Perhaps some of this leads to forms of abuse as well? In fact, we are The People of The Story.

The ancient words from Deuteronomy, "A wandering Aramean was my ancestor..." are still repeated in sacred ritual by the Jewish people today. The story of a great nation enslaved in Egypt, then delivered under the leadership of Moses, is the very crux of Judaism's Salvation History, while they still await their Messiah. So we Christians have nomadic roots. Our journey goes right back to the wilderness wanderings of Canaan and down into Egypt and to a Tent of Meeting, a Tabernacle that travelled by day and by night with the Ark of the Covenant. For a time our forebears settled in the Land of Promise where a Temple was built only to be destroyed a number of times; for we were to learn finally, in these later times, of the God who pitched his tent in human form right in our back yard and in our face. The nomadic tribe has now become the people of the incarnation, the body of Christ and themselves, temples of the Holy Spirit. How awesome is this

journey.

John's famous Prologue (John 1.1-18) embraces the journey of the eternal Logos: the Word of God.. This eternal Word became a human being and lived right here among us. The Greek literally means: 'entabernacled' or 'pitched his tent' among us. Christ is our new Tent of Meeting, for we are the body of Christ. Imagine Jesus turning up at West Beach with his camper trailer! Picture it with me for a moment. People settling in for a frolicking, boozy, laid back time at the beach, letting their guards down with neighbours they only see once a year or never again. You go over to give him a hand with the annex, all the poles and canvas, and he says, "Peace be with you" and hands you a stubby. "Yeah, g'day to you too mate. Interesting jargon: you must be from Tassie!" His eyes look right into you and before you know it he says, "Let's eat!" Some people would be quite honoured to have him there; others quite annoyed, knowing that the walls are so thin and the jokes a bit on the nose to put it mildly. The mind boggles.

God chose a very ordinary event in history to do extraordinary things. His very best shot at us came in the very ordinary business of a very ordinary town during a census, with war, racism, terrorism, poverty and exploitation hovering all around, along with angels and shepherds. Into all of this he pitched his tent. How could this make a difference to our world then? How can it today? We believe in a God who knows the way around this world, who doesn't wave a magic wand, or descend briefly from the sky to clean things up. God arrives on earth as a human being who will change things simply by the completeness of divine love: Jesus. Jesus gives himself to this transforming purpose in every moment, whatever it costs. And the world changes...we are changed. New things become possible for us, new levels of loving response and involvement. As has often been said, the Christian answer to the trouble and evil in this world is not a theory but the *story and reality* of a life and a death and a rising; Jesus'

life and death and rising. And for that answer to be credible now, that story has to be visible in *our* story too. Christ has to pitch his tent in your heart and mind and soul, and mine too.

These last two weeks have been another tumultuous time for our nation and our church, particularly for our Roman Catholic sisters and brothers. Actions so contrary to the heart, mind and life of Christ have been perpetrated. More than ever, Christians are called to put on the whole garment of Christ and to incarnate Christ's authentic love in every corner and crevice of life.

Think of your story today at the beginning of another Lenten journey. It is in the ordinary, transparent things of your life and service that God incarnates the real work and does extraordinary things that will change the world. Let the salvation history keep rolling on. Or as someone recently observed in a Q&A hashtag: Let's make Christianity great again!

For personal reflection:

1. Where did your story of faith begin?
2. Ponder the 'rites of passage' that you may have celebrated, e.g. Confirmation
3. Who are some of your favourite Bible heroes?
4. What pieces of Scripture excite you about faith?
5. Are there traditions in your family that still live on?
6. What do you hope to receive from God this Lent?
7. How might you be 're-clothed' in the garment of Christ?
8. Conclude with a prayer for those
 1. a) who feel 'cut off' from their story, alone, or depressed.
 2. b) preparing for Baptism, Confirmation and the Renewal of Faith.