

**“Witnessing the Resurrection” a sermon for Easter 7 based on Acts 1:15-17, 21-26; John 17:6-19 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on 17 May 2015**

1. Tony Campolo realised he was not cut out for pastoral ministry when he reflected on how he engaged someone at the Church door after a service of worship. He got a bit wandery during a prayer but thought nothing of it until confronted at the door. The person said ... that was the most ungrammatical prayer I have ever heard ... to which he replied ... I wasn't talking to you. He chose another path.

In the gospel today, as Jesus prays to God, Jesus isn't talking to us either.

We're eavesdropping - we were meant to.

It's the moment when you hear your parents talking with each other and they don't realise you are in earshot. And as you listen you realise they are talking about their deepest dreams for you, how they are trying to help you, and at that moment you sense their love for you, their concern for you, their interest in you, and you are overcome with gratitude and humility.

2. This is no casual conversation.

It happens on the doorstep of death.

Many years ago a friend and parishioner was nearing death. We had a communion service around his bed, with him propped up with pillows. The extended family was there. After the service, we talked. Our congregation had been working closely with the local Catholic church, worshipping together in each other's churches. The family was from Northern Ireland and our friend's uncle said he was not terribly happy about this developing relationship with the Catholic Church. There was more conversation and then our friend said "Do you imagine that where I am about to go there are only Protestants." No one said much after that. ...

On the doorstep of death people don't pretend.

So here we are on the doorstep of death.

Jesus is about to go away, in a sense.

Rowan Williams, the former Archbishop of Canterbury.

Jesus hasn't just gone away. He has gone deeper into the heart of reality—our reality and God's. He has become far more than a visible friend and companion; he has shown himself to be the very centre of our life, the source of our loving energy in the world and the source of our prayerful, trustful waiting on God. He has made us able to be a new kind of human being, silently and patiently trusting God as a loving parent, actively and

hopefully at work to make a difference in the world, to make the kind of difference love makes.

3. From the heart of reality, he prays for us.

“All mine are yours and yours are mine ...”

Jesus regards me as belonging to God, not as a chattel, as a child. He regards us as God’s.

Every week, our central stained glass window reminds us that Jesus is praying for us, lifting us up before God, raising us up in prayer, giving to us.

Here is the fundamental reality of life itself: that every day God gives Godself to us.

4. It’s mighty hard to keep remembering that; mighty easy to forget it.

Other relationships claim loyalty – we have loyalty cards.

Others suggest our identity is defined by belonging to this or achieving that.

Gradually, imperceptibly, we lose the sense that Jesus sees us as a gift to God and God as a gift to us.

We make faith a task to be performed.

Church can also wear faith down, so we feel guilty we are not doing better, not praying more, not giving more, not acting more lovingly.

I wonder if many people leave Church, not because they stop believing, but because they are exhausted at trying to be Christian, as Christianity is presented to them.

They imagine it is about doing better.

Jesus knows how easy it is to miss the mark about faith.

He prays - “They are in the world. Protect them in your name, so that they may be one as we are one. While I was with them I protected them. I guarded them.”

5. The Gospel is that our fundamental identity isn’t what we make of life, what we build, what we achieve, what we do; it’s not about our goodness or lack of it – it’s what we are given, it’s what we are fore-given, it’s what we are before given – we are God’s.

We ritualise that truth.

Baptism is the sacrament that celebrates God given to us – God saying - you are mine and I am yours.

The Lord’s Supper celebrates God given to us – God saying - you are mine and I am yours.

Worship celebrates God given to us, week by week – God saying - you are mine and I am yours.

Here is the ground of our living.

6. Then Jesus prays that his joy may be made complete in us.

Joy is the by-product of God given to us.

Whenever I see the word joy, I remember words written about Dietrich Bonhoeffer at the end of his life.

Bonhoeffer was the German pastor of the Confessing Church who was killed by Nazi soldiers a week before his prison was liberated.

An American soldier who was in the opposite cell not long before he died wrote of him diffusing an atmosphere of joy, in every smallest event in life, and of sharing that joy with those around him.

Even in the final hours of Bonhoeffer's life, God's gift was so significant to him, he sought out others to share it.

Joy – the blessed byproduct.

7. Another by-product of God's gift to us is community, deep connection among people who sense what they receive, day by day, week by week.

Community is a by-product of God given to us.

Last Sunday night I asked our student and young professionals group where they saw God the week before, where they experienced grace, where they discerned the presence of Jesus.

We talked about wonder and awe at the beauty of nature.

We talked about guidance in our lives, of feeling led to make a sound decision.

We talked about the feelings music awakens.

We talked about the privilege of sharing people's journeys and challenges.

We talked about gratitude for the gifts that enabled us to learn at Otago.

We went beyond our individual experience, to sharing the experience, to expanding our experience, by listening to each other.

8. This is how we grow, by listening to other's experiences of Jesus, of God, of grace.

I notice Jesus often is with three people.

Who are three people with whom you might connect deeply (Peter, James and John; Mary, Martha and Lazarus)?

Often Jesus is with twelve people. Who are twelve people with whom you might connect significantly (the disciples)?

But not just about anything.

Where did you experience God last week? Where did you notice grace last week? Where did you sense the presence of Christ last week?

The U.S. preacher Barbara Brown Taylor

"Gradually I remembered what I had known all along, which is that church is not a stopping place but a starting place for discerning God's presence in this world. By offering people a place where they may engage the steady practice of listening to divine words and celebrating divine sacraments, church can help people gain a feel for how God shows up-- not only in Holy Bibles and Holy Communion but also in near neighbours, mysterious strangers, sliced bread, and grocery store wine." from *Leaving Church*

9. When the first disciples needed to find a replacement for Judas, they looked for people who had witnessed resurrection.

Witnessing resurrection –

Witnessing people persevering through pain;

Witnessing people overcoming prejudice;

Witnessing people acting for justice;

Witnessing communities becoming healthy.

Jesus prays for us, everyday every moment.

In our everyday world, there are signs of grace, of the presence of God, of the resurrection of Christ.

We are invited to notice them, to witness them, to witness to them to each other.

So we grow.