

“A defiant hope” a sermon preached on Easter Day by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Sunday 16 April 2017, and there was a baptism and profession of faith.

I invite you to imagine for a moment ...

My name is Flavius, and I am a senior official reporting to Pilate.

Well that was a bit messy, but we've put down another darned Galileean uprising. Who do these Galileans think they are? And why does it always happen at Passover. Thank goodness we relocated our headquarters here and we had those extra soldiers and we had that inside informer – in the end the leader and his followers just folded, crumpled, end. What a sad group they were - poor, raw, ragged. We won't be hearing anything more from him or them. They ran away at the crucial moment. That movement is not going anywhere. Incredible the crowd chose Barabbas, nasty piece of work. But I worry about insidious insurrectionists. So unpredictable – a donkey - ha. And the ideas they have - they can overthrow us, really – tiny group of people, dead leader, fleeing followers. And that they might change the world – justice, we will show you justice. Well, that's all done and dusted, tidied away, never to be heard of again.

I invite you to imagine he turns up today.

You've got to be kidding. You mean that this Frances and this Rachel are part of the movement that ended 2000 years ago, tidied away, never to be heard of again, done and dusted, stamped out. And these two people are joining that group of fishers and tax collectors and zealots? Do you really think they can change the world? You're like weeds, just keep popping up, won't go away. We try to empty your imagination, and you grow poets. We try to say nothing can change, and you breed prophets. We try to shut you up, and you encourage preachers. We try to put you in a box called religion for those kind of people, and you won't stay there. You just keep breaking out. Unbelievable. But let me say to you, there is more than one resurrection. For you may think you have done with the emperor and Pilate, but we come back every generation. There is more than one resurrection.

Then my mind went to another place.

Someone hearing the rumour about the empty tomb.

Did you hear what Mary said. There was a person looking like a gardener near the tomb. A gardener. Why did she think he was the gardener? Did he have dirty knees? Or dirty fingernails? Or calloused hands? Was he carrying a spade? And she thought he was a body snatcher. And now she says it was Jesus. So how are **we** meant to recognise him? Do we go around looking for people who could be mistaken for gardeners and body snatchers? She said it was when he called her name. But it seems to be hard to sense him – when it is dark, when we weep, when we don't really know what is going on.

And yet that is when he called her name. Are we capable of being surprised? Are we able to be called when we least expect it?

The poet Mary Oliver describes what that is like in a poem called Singapore ...

In Singapore, in the airport,
a darkness was ripped from my eyes.
In the women's restroom, one compartment stood open.
A woman knelt there, washing something
in the white bowl.

Disgust argued in my stomach
and I felt, in my pocket, for my ticket.

... then she shifts tone because it seems to be getting too personal, too intimate, with a cleaner at Singapore airport.

A poem should always have birds in it.
Kingfishers, say, with their bold eyes and gaudy wings.
Rivers are pleasant, and of course trees.
A waterfall, or if that's not possible, a fountain
rising and falling.
A person wants to stand in a happy place, in a poem.

... yes, the world of nature, but she cannot leave the encounter, she has to return to the woman ...

When the woman turned I could not answer her face.
Her beauty and her embarrassment struggled together,
and neither could win ...

She is washing the tops of the airport ashtrays, as big as
hubcaps, with a blue rag.

Her small hands turn the metal, scrubbing and rinsing.

She does not work slowly, nor quickly, like a river.

Her dark hair is like the wing of a bird.

And then the poem concludes by suggesting what happened:

Neither do I mean anything miraculous, but only
the light that can shine out of a life. I mean
the way she unfolded and refolded the blue cloth,
the way her smile was only for my sake; I mean
the way this poem is filled with trees, and birds.

The encounter ... a cleaner in an airport ... and she attended, she noticed.

In lives there are no flashing neon lights that say – resurrection, risen Christ
– this way. Of course, there are places we meet, we encounter. But even
then it is so easy to miss.

Resurrection is about a life-giving presence, a loving word, a galvanising call,
from one who looks like a gardener and a body snatcher.

A poem by Malcolm Guite

As though some heavy stone were rolled away,
You find an open door where all was closed,
Wide as an empty tomb on Easter Day.

Lost in your own dark wood, alone, astray,
You pause, as though some secret were disclosed,
As though some heavy stone were rolled away.

You glimpse the sky above you, wan and grey,
Wide through those shadowed branches interposed,
Wide as an empty tomb on Easter Day.

Perhaps there's light enough to find your way,
For now the tangled wood feels less enclosed,
As though some heavy stone were rolled away.

You lift your feet out of the miry clay
And seek the light in which you once reposed,
Wide as an empty tomb on Easter Day.

And then Love calls your name, you hear Him say:
The way is open, death has been deposed,
As though some heavy stone were rolled away,
And you are free at last on Easter Day.

Resurrection promulgates a weedy movement that pops up here in two people, Frances and Rachel. Frances who is being shaped by parents and grandparents and friends, and who is inviting us to join with others to love her and to nourish her in the way of love. And Rachel who has been nourished in the faith by parents and grandparents and friends and church and who is saying ... I want to follow Jesus for the rest of my life. And for that she needs people around her. It takes a village to raise a child; it takes a village to raise a follower. And there is no better way to counter the empire in all its constricting oppression and its lack of imagination and its incapacity to believe that this world can be different, than what we are doing today in being a movement of followers, immersing people in the love of God, so that the Spirit fires them with a defiant hope.

KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

growing in courage to live the Jesus way



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