

“From buried seed, fruitfulness” a sermon based on John 12:20-33 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on 18 March 2018, the fifth Sunday of Lent.

Yesterday was the annual regatta at Turangawaewae marae in Ngaruawahia. Including waka races on the Waikato river. My parents took me there when I was a child. Paddlers paddled as fast as they could in these large wakas, aiming for a low beam just above the water. Their aim was to get the waka over the low beam. Gaining speed, they struck the low beam, and because of its shape, the waka gradually rode up it, with the paddlers still paddling as fast as they could, unrelenting, until the waka pivoted forward and the paddlers at the front then paddled as fast as they could to get the waka off the beam.

Waka after waka.

It mesmerised me. To this day, and I have not been there for decades, I can still feel the excitement and I tell others about it and encourage them to go if they are nearby.

As an adult, I wonder what it was that enabled me to be mesmerised. I was in a safe place. I was with family I trusted. I was with people for whom this was an experience they enjoyed. As the waka rode up on the beam, nothing else existed for me. I was in the ferocious paddling. I lost myself there.

More than that though, this was part of who I was. Toku awa ko Waikato. It was an expression of my identity. Not that I knew that at the time. I am still growing into it.

I know the experience of being lost happens to people in different ways.

Being with people at the moment of dying, absorbed.

Weeping with people as they tell of an horrific experience.

Doing well what we do best.

Hearing great music.

Having great fun.

Noticing beauty.

Intense sustained silence.

We find ourselves in a different place, a different realm, not noticing the time, not hearing the phone, not attending to what else is happening.

Losing ourselves.

And at the same time feeling more fully alive, feeling more fully ourselves.

“Love does that. We are no longer the centre, someone else is. We forget ourself. We deny ourself. We give of ourself, so that by all the rules of arithmetic there should be less of ourself than there was to start with. Only by a curious paradox there is more. We feel that at last we really *are* ourself.” Frederick Buechner.

Greeks were in Jerusalem, at the great Jewish festival of Passover. They went to Phillip, with his Greek name. “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” Philip went and told Andrew. Andrew and Philip went and told Jesus.

They didn't want to know the people around Jesus.

They didn't want to see the results of Jesus.

"Sir, we wish to see Jesus."

And he speaks of a grain of wheat falling into the ground, of giving up trying to save our life, losing it instead.

What a challenge that is in our society when we are taught distrust, suspicion, keeping a distance.

Because so much trust has been abused.

A close friend lost her savings because she trusted a reputable accountant.

Another close friend trusted a minister.

Others have trusted lawyers.

Gradually, distrust, distance, cynicism, suspicion and fear seep through our society infecting us.

Faith does not come by keeping at a reasoned distance.

Presbyterians especially can wrongly imagine that faith is some kind of logical decision, of weighing up this faith in comparison with that faith, of making some kind of cool objective analysis.

Or they can be fooled into thinking it is primarily a matter of living by certain values within society's framework.

I don't discount reason and I don't encourage credulity, but faith is more than logic.

We sell our young people short especially, if they detect from us a cool detachment that stands back.

Years ago, I worshipped in some Orthodox churches in Eastern Europe.

Two hours. Standing. Unfamiliar language. Unfamiliar ritual. And I barely noticed.

No one checked their watch, although people came and went with ease.

They knew the Secret Police were there, taking their names.

They knew the official line was to rubbish what they did.

All that around.

Yet the choir sang. The priest intoned the service. The people kissed the icons and the Bible. They breathed the incense. They listened to the sermon. The children fidgeted. People were caught up in the devotion while some peered through the windows.

They were in love.

Faith is losing ourselves with Jesus, to go where Jesus goes, to be how Jesus is.

Not in a mesmerising moment, but as a life-long process of falling into the earth, like a seed.

Oscar Romero had just finished preaching on the text we heard this morning, in the chapel in San Salvador, when he was shot and killed by government agents.

The day before his death, Romero pleaded with his nation's soldiers to disobey unjust orders and stop the repression in El Salvador. He called on them to listen to the voice of God, whatever the cost.

Up to three years before, he was seen as a "quiet, pious, conservative cleric," (*according to Catholic peace activist John Dear*).

A priest worked to help people who were poor remember their own dignity. When agents of the Salvadorean government killed the priest, Romero heard the voice of God telling him to speak out.

"When I looked at Rutilio lying there dead," he said, "I thought, 'If they have killed him for doing what he did, then I too have to walk the same path.'" Some call this Romero's conversion. He saw it "as a development of the same desire I have always had to be faithful to what God asks of me."

Romero didn't regard his life as being worth more than those of the many poor farmers who were being murdered by death squads.

"One must not love oneself so much as to avoid getting involved in the risks of life that history demands of us," Romero said in that final sermon.

"Those who try to fend off the danger will lose their lives. Those who out of love for Christ give themselves to the service of others will live like the grain of wheat."

And at the end of the sermon he was shot. He fell into the earth.

Romero knew faith meant living in, being buried in, falling into the soil, as we fall into love.

And like the seed, from that falling, giving in to the falling, losing ourselves in Christ, life can flourish.

From that falling, we are drawn into all that the earth is and all that Christ is, with his flourishing.

From that falling, from that losing, from that dying, we are raised to eternal life, abundant life, life open to God's world.

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