

“Living in the Resurrection” a sermon based on Revelation 5:11-14, Acts 9:1-20 and John 21:1-6, preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church, Dunedin New Zealand on 5 May 2019.

The resurrection of Jesus set off such an explosion that the church continues to explore what it means. And not just what it means, but what difference it makes. And not just what difference it makes, but how to live in it.

From the gospels we hear of disciples being turned from fear to courage, from hiding behind closed doors to communicating hope even to hostile people. The Easter events animate people with a confidence and a passion surprising and unpredictable.

Yet when the risen Christ first comes to his disciples, they don't recognise him. Earlier in John, we find Mary mistaking Jesus for the gardener. In Luke, the two disciples on the Emmaus road fail to recognise their companion as they walk along and only recognise him when he breaks the bread. In what is known as the longer ending of Mark, Jesus appears in different forms to various disciples. In Matthew, some of the disciples doubt it is the risen Jesus even when he stands before them. Thomas is not alone in his refusal to believe.

How do we come to recognise the risen Jesus when he is front of us, or beckoning to us from a place nearby?

The question from the fish story today. A stranger calling from the shore that they cast the net on the other side of the boat. Not a big change. Same fishers. Same boats. Same nets. Same equipment. Same practices that they had used many times. They used what was familiar in a different place. Who knows what that might have involved. Perhaps turning the boat around or standing in a different part of the boat facing in a different direction. Who knows.

Fishing is an image used for how God hauls creation into the realm of God. The net is cast so people come to live God's way in the world. The church is one of the ways God draws creation towards God's world.

The book of Revelation portrays that new world. “Myriads of myriads and thousands and thousands, singing with full voice.” Every creature in heaven and on earth. A picture of the earth and all its inhabitants drawn in praise and wonder.

Last week I heard the Vatican astronomer speaking at the University. He began by showing a clip of the surface of Mars taken from the vehicle trundling across it. And a scientist speaking with wonder about Mars as a place, a scientist awakened to wonder, to beauty. Part of creation's beauty is its diversity.

Letty Russell – “God’s intention is to create a world of riotous difference.”

Earthing the vision in the local congregation, Jean Vanier, founder of the L’Arche community – “Communities who welcome strangers should ask for minimal conformity and provide maximum space for diversity.”

To which even Saul turned, Saul breathing threats and murder, Saul on his way to Damascus to shut down the early Christian movement, blinded Saul who did not initially recognise Jesus.

The person crucial to the opening of his eyes was Ananias, Ananias who came to see that even volcanic scary Saul could possibly take the gospel of Jesus to Gentiles and kings and the people of Israel. So no doubt with great fear, Ananias went and commissioned Saul to cast the net on the other side.

The story is among our texts because resurrection did not stop with Jesus. Nor did it stop with the first disciples. Saul is a generation later, and the one who took it to the next generation was Ananias, living in the resurrection, responsive, engaging, listening and sharing the story. Ananias, showing why the church exists and what it is for.

A week ago we shared in a wonderful workshop on welcoming. .

We have described ourselves as a congregation captivated by the biblical vision of the realm of God, made known in Jesus, given in grace. One of the pointers to that vision is radical hospitality – “We want to invite, welcome, receive and support people who are strangers and keep discovering with them the richness of life in a loving Christ. We will develop relationships that might lead to neighbours offering us hospitality including in unfamiliar environments. We will go the second mile to include people and be changed by our interaction with them.”

We didn’t make that up. All we are doing is restating what we know from our faith.

Henry Brinton wrote a book called “The Welcoming Congregation” based on interviews and studies among congregations.

In its introduction, William Willimon says – “I have learned that the main difference between a congregation in decline and one with a future is the difference between practising the faith for the exclusive benefit of “insiders” (the members of that congregation) or passionate concern for the “outsiders” (those who have yet to hear and respond to the gospel).”

Brinton encourages people to think of themselves as hosts rather than as guests.

“We can sometimes go to church with the attitude of a guest. As guests, we enter the church and look for our friends. We pass personal judgement on the furniture, décor and feel of the place. We sit where we want to sit, with little regard for making room for others. We listen to the church’s music, and decide whether we enjoy it or not. As guests we are basically consumers ...”

“How different it is to be a host. In this role we are focused primarily on serving others. We greet our guests at the door and look to connect them with people they would enjoy. We make sure that the church is ... conducive to people getting to know one another. We sit in places that leave room for others and help them to feel comfortable. We pick church music that our guests would like, even if it is not our favourite. As hosts we are concerned about ... others. The experience is all about them.”

In the fourth century St Chrysostom preached about hospitality, referring to 1 Timothy: “The hospitality here spoken of is not merely a friendly reception, but one given with zeal and full of life, with readiness, and going about it as if one were receiving Christ himself.”

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Some comments from the welcoming workshop –

- Welcoming involves the whole community, not just those designated to welcome;
- It is about meeting people where they are, allowing ourselves to be changed by our interactions with others;
- What are people looking for and how can we help them in their search?
- Finding a common connection with another person and building on it;
- Ask open-ended questions and don't assume all young people are studying;
- Be gentle when engaging with people; take care not to be overly intrusive e.g. "Why are you here?" is quite a loaded question to open a conversation.
- Listen, listen, listen – show this with body language, facial language, eyes. If you are going to ask a question, do it because you are prepared to properly absorb the response;
- Welcoming is not just about the initial interactions but also about follow-up, once people have begun to settle in. Check up on people after they have been attending for a while;
- Don't let the main thing we do at morning tea be business, rosters, accounts etc. The main thing we do at morning tea is fellowship, making new friends.
- It matters that we keep our noticeboards up-to-date and interesting;
- The space can be welcoming when we are not here, so let's be creative about how we might do this.
- We welcome people because it is a core part of what it means to follow Jesus.

KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

a community working to make real God's realm



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