

Reflecting

Why is it that women are rarely believed? Over the last couple of years, we have heard difficult accounts from women of how they are mistreated and then disbelieved in workplaces, even the parliaments of the nation. Nothing much has changed.

Luke tells us that while the male disciples flee from the events of Jesus' trial and crucifixion, the women stay; and watch. *They* take it all in. They see all of the grizzly events as they unfold and they put the pieces together in order to understand and retell what has taken place. The two men in dazzling white tell the women what Jesus has already told the male disciples multiple times but which they have not been able to hear: *Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be handed over to sinners, and be crucified, and on the third day rise again.* The truth is entrusted to the women. They can hear it, in spite of their state of terror.

The culture of death enacted in the crucifixion, which seeks to eradicate the Lord of Life, does not have the final say and on this morning he breaks free from the bonds of death, releasing into the world the irrepressible life of God. The culture of death which always threatens to overwhelm and consume us is defeated by God's raising of Jesus from death. Into the world is released the all-embracing grace of God. Peter shares all-embracing love of God with the household of Cornelius. In the dream given to him, he is released from his religious and nationalistic exclusivism which insisted that the Roman soldier and his family were beyond the pale.

These last weeks as the terrible events have unfolded in Ukraine, we can see the impact of strident nationalism mixed with religion – how this fosters a culture of death and destruction. This is the same strident mix of political power and religion Jesus and the disciples were terrorised by. It is the world we inhabit still. It is just that the means of death have become so much more developed and destructive in our time. These cultures of death flourish on lies.

As the women watch, as they, in spite of their fear and their own vulnerability, observe the horror of what is done to Jesus, they see the truth of what happens. To them is entrusted the news that this, though, is not the final word.

As we reread the difficult story of the Passion each year we act as witnesses to what is done to Jesus. In doing so we are then also unafraid to act as witnesses to innocent people who suffer in our own time: mistreated women, the indigenous people of our nation, the appalling plight of asylum seekers by our country, the neglect and mistreatment, the dishonouring of the elderly in our country. As people of the cross we are not afraid to look at suffering and see the possibility of resurrection, of redemption, of the lowly being lifted up. A culture of death turns away, insists on the inevitability of the situation, its necessity, that nothing can be done. As people of the Resurrection, we can go to the gates of hell with hope and with healing balm to receive the dead and be bearers of resurrection.

On Easter morning in church, we will sing a hymn by Jock Curle which concludes with these words:

For the glory of salvation
in the dawn of Easter day
we will praise you, loving Father;
we rejoice to sing and pray
with the Son and with the Spirit.

Lead us on, your great array,
saints and sinners celebrating
your triumphant love today.

On the first Easter morning a long procession of disciples through time began with the women returning from the tomb, with the news that death and fear were not the last word that we can go to the gates of hell and come back from death. We stand in this procession of saints and sinners making our way to gates of glory celebrating the breaking through of love and the joy of being disciples of the crucified and risen one.

Christ is risen!