

Epiphany 3

7th February 2021

Isaiah 40. 21-31

1 Corinthians 9. 22-23

Mark 1. 29-39

There is an unusual intimacy about this scene with Jesus and the disciples going to the house of Peter. They have been at the synagogue – public space – and now return to private, domestic space. Surprisingly, Peter, here called Simon, is married, and I suppose has children. Yet we are told he leaves them and goes off, fishing for men (people). At the end of this episode Jesus then goes to solitary space.

But he is pulled back into the needs of the crowds which have already begun to follow him. The need is clearly great, and he speaks to them and heals them in ways which point to the kingdom of heaven. The calling of the church is to seek to embody the Christ in our own place and time. This is the mystery of what the church seeks to do. Yet we carry this calling in the flawed containers of human organizations. While now at a two millennia remove from the life of Jesus and having so many different forms of the church, each with its own traditions and emphases, each is called to bring the kingdom close.

As Christendom, which we all grew up in and which formed our sense of the church, is passing away, the calling to the leadership of the church is to adapt to this new reality and to make space for the spirit to thrive. In reality what we have understandably done over past decades is to hold tightly to what was slipping away. Each of us have our own reasons for doing so, not least of these because this was what formed us. But space needs to be made for something new. We need to be able to do this if our church is to have a future - we need to let go, make space for freedom and for new possibilities to emerge. The future will be a time primarily of the spirit, not of programs, which was the character of the church life we knew.

We are undergoing quite a transition as a congregation today. Heather Baxter, while continuing as a church councilor, is retiring after 22 years in the role as church council secretary. What will Heather do now we might well ask? (A good lie down to begin with possibly) Brian Moore, a new member of church council, has offered to be secretary. We have a new treasurer in Dennis Taylor. And we have Lynley Moore, Lisa Saffin and Brad Denniston as members of the steering group for the Ormond Learning HUB. You have had a commitment to becoming a learning community for some time now, but the distractions of the building project have diverted and delayed the beginning of this work. This year we are stepping out to begin the work of the HUB.

Our way of being church was about busyness with programs. But these are not first and foremost the measure of congregational vitality. While they can be indicators of this, undergirding them needs to be a sense of spirit which resonates with the ministry of Jesus. Paul's image of the Body of Christ continues to be a rich one for us- the body made of many parts, united and inspired by the mind and spirit of the Christ

To discover this solidarity and inspiration, requires a willingness to withdraw and be still and to listen for the nurturing touch of God, as Jesus does after being at Peter's house. This is the prelude to action. We are so attached to being busy. Too many of us were raised with a sense that our value as people and our sense of self worth is based on our busyness and achievements.

This is corrosive to gaining a sense of our self as children of God. We are forced to find this centredness in God as we move into old age but Jesus, even as a young and much-in-demand man, knew the importance of this.

We can pray for our congregational leaders today as they are commissioned, that individually and jointly that they will be able to seek that still small voice that nurtures, inspires and sustains the life of God within and so lead this community into new places.

Andrew Boyle