

Ephesians 6. 11-22

Mark 6. 30-34, 53-56

In 2017 a young Sudanese-born, Australian woman made a Facebook post just before ANZAC day that year. In the post she made reference to both ANZAC Day and to the conflicts happening around the world at the time – most of them – now 4 years later - still unresolved. Lest we forget, she wrote: Manus, Nauru, Syria, Palestine. Seven words.

It was the one day of the year: ANZAC Day. She didn't criticise Australian soldiers or comment on the politics of wars Australia has fought. There was no disparagement of the people who remember Gallipoli with pride and sadness, nor did she make a long or public statement about the morality of wars we were currently fighting. She simply asked that we remember, in addition to past lives lost, the people fleeing, dying and lost in wars being fought at the time. She was hardly the only person to have done so.

Nevertheless, there was an eruption of public and political hostility towards her – out of all proportion to the strength and the tone of the comments she made. But, Yassmin Abdel-Magied, an ABC commentator - a woman, a Moslem woman in a head scarf, an immigrant, was harried from the ABC for which she worked at the time and ultimately out of the country. Yassmin had also been Queensland Australian of the year. She is no slouch. The speed of the public rounding on her and the hysteria around her comments was truly astounding. She was scapegoated, victimised and expelled.

The philosopher Rene Girard says that we mark our boundaries with victims. Girard spent a lifetime studying human societies, especially through their literature and through human rituals. Maybe his lifetime's work might be summed up in these few words – we mark our boundaries with victims.

Girard contends that as humans we develop our cultures - our families, our towns and villages, societies and countries - and we define what it means to belong by drawing a boundary. And when someone crosses the boundary we victimise them; expel them, expunge them from our midst, exterminate them. The treatment and expulsion of Yasmin Abdel-Magied in 2017 was shocking in how hair-trigger this mechanism is for us. The immediacy of it all was utterly breathtaking. As Australians we espouse a rhetoric of a fair-go for all, we pride ourselves as egalitarian and inclusive. But the truth is – like every other collective - we retain the freedom to scapegoat and are clearly willing to readily use it when some sacredness about our self-story is jabbed. In our case the ANZAC story.

What we do in war is we mark national boundaries with victims, usually young men, perfectly formed and ready for sacrifice (like the ancient Israelites required an unblemished lamb) – we give them over to the need for national security and identity – sacrificed in our names. I recently watched two national leaders of countries that were formerly enemies, at a wreath-laying ceremony at a war memorial. One leader was visiting the other leader's country. They each walked forward with appropriate dignity, each bearing a wreath – a memorial to their own dead - and simultaneously laid their wreath – we would say honouring those dead young men and

women, sacrificed in *their* former conflict. It was very dignified, they were respectful of each other and each other's national identities and their hard-won autonomy. And they could do this because at some time in the past they had marked their boundaries, their mutual boundaries, with victims. A terrible loss, goes the rhetoric; a necessary loss, a regrettable loss; Lest we forget; their name shall liveth for evermore. But politicians will at some point again, send yet another wave of young people to the sacrifice.

So, what we have read from the letter to the Ephesians goes to the heart of this boundary marking which we do as humans. ... now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.

It is clear that this letter is addressing some hostility between Jews and gentiles in the church in Ephesus. Old hostilities are rising to the surface and threatening unity.

It is hard to get inside the distaste and distrust (*animus*) that Jews and their neighbours shared for each other 2000 years ago. Clearly it was powerful. Maybe an example of how powerful this culture was is found in the story from chapter 7 from Mark's gospel when Jesus goes to the Mediterranean coast at Tyre – gentile territory - and a local woman comes to him, pleading for healing for her daughter. A lone woman, a gentile. Jesus infers she is a dog; in Australian colloquialism Jesus calls her bitch. She puts it up to Jesus and he acknowledges his blindness and heals the daughter. But we get a window into the hostility between Jews and gentiles.

It's into this animosity that the letter to the Ephesians speaks – putting to death the hostility between Jews and gentiles – 2 warring groups.

The gospels are in some sense an account of Jesus walking into the no man's land where human animosity meets and wars – and offers himself as sacrifice. IN each of the Gospels Jesus makes his way to Jerusalem quite clear about the fate he will meet there. It is not so much that he was fated to die by the will of God; rather he was fated to die because of the way our human societies work; by our ever-ready need to make victims. To mark our boundaries with victims. Maybe the most famous known no-man's land of our own time were those on the western front during WWI. Tens of thousands of young men mindlessly sacrificed in a carnage of boundary marking. Lest we forget.

It is into this no man's land that Jesus – called by Mark the human one – walks and stands utterly alone; and is exterminated. - *now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ. For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.*

In the celebrating of the eucharist we repeat Jesus' words as he shares the last supper with the disciples. Eat this bread broken for you; drink this cup, my blood poured out for you. Do this in remembrance of me. Do this. Remember. Remember, because you will see it again and again; this making of victims, just as I have been victimised. Remember. Don't forget. Because as you remember you will see the victimising in your own place and time – maybe in yourselves - and my death will save you from doing it again, in your own time and place. In this you will be free. In your remembering you will be free to create something new. In remembering you will know the truth; and the truth will set you free.

The mindset about the Eucharist many of us were raised with was that you need to be good enough to come to communion. Everything needs to be set right with God first. But it's clear from Jesus' marking of the Last Supper with the disciples that this was not so. There was Judas, about to betray him. There was Peter, about to deny him. There were the others certain in their loyalty, not knowing what was about to come. We are invited to come to the eucharist in all our light and dark, our certainty and uncertainty, our loyalties – both clear-eyed and misguided, and take into our selves the sacrificed one and feed on him and assure ourselves that this sacrifice is enough for us. That we can settle into the peace which passes understanding and be nourished by Christ's life and death and God's vindication of Jesus and his way in the resurrection. This is sustenance enough for our journey; for our healing; for our wholeness.

*For he is our peace; in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us.*

Thanks be to God.

Andrew Boyle