

Anticipation, disappointment but *not* indifference

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As we continue on our journey of opposites – of the tensions between the readings, I can't help but ground it in the real world. The ups and downs of COVID rules, the sudden closures and equally sudden openings and the ever-changing allowances. Health vs economy, state-interests vs National interests, risk vs common sense. It all calls for flexibility, agility, loose planning and resilience to deal with disappointment. It calls for faith in our leaders and scientists and a wise discerning of what to do; what not to do – how not to be distracted or become complacent. How do we welcome strangers but also recognise they could be the ones to burst our perfect bubble?

The newspaper this morning asked, if Boris Johnson is rolling out vaccines next week, why oh why is Australia taking so long (ie 4-6 weeks)? And I thought well,

- **one**, no one is dying in the street here. The UK is reporting 648 deaths a day (nearly 60,000 total). We had one death last week... and
- **Two**, Boris isn't saving lives, he is trying to save his political career. I would certainly trust the TGA more than I would ever trust Boris. I'll wait. We know it works. Let's be sure it is safe.

Asking the question says a lot about where our national psyche is right now. How long, Lord, how long.

And that's Advent.

Isaiah's passage was written after the first destruction of Jerusalem and the people have been taken to Babylon in slavery. He prophesies a super highway, bringing them all back home. The hills will be flattened, the valleys raised....and a triumphant march, no not march, procession with horns a blaring– bagpipes if you like - as the children of Israel march gloriously into their homeland.

Fast forward several hundred years, almost 200 years after the crucifixion, and the letter in 2 Peter is saying, how long, Lord? How long? The people are getting antsy. Christians have pledged to wait for the Day of the Lord. It's been more than a while. The waiting has not led to apathy but has lent an edge of urgency to the quality of life. Some believe you can only maintain anticipation for so long.

But that's not true.

Anticipation is not a finite resource but it is a bit like an old Toyota: Indestructible. It can be battered, faded, beaten down but it's still running somewhere. Disappointment can add a few more dents but only indifference can kill it.

The readings have us marching to the crucifixion while anticipating the birth of Jesus. The apocalyptic texts tell us it *will* get bad, and it *will* get worse but the day of the Lord is coming.

The reading from Mark is placed here to make it absolutely clear that he is anticipating, nay predicting, that the OT prophecies of Malachi (3:1) and Isaiah (40:3) will come true. John the Baptist is a modern Elijah. A king is coming to lead us out. Too right!

Here is a recipe for soul exhaustion - Anticipation, disappointment, anticipation, more disappointment -repeat until you almost forget what you are waiting for...until you disconnect and it all becomes a blur and cacophony- the discordant sound you try to ignore. Have you ever felt that?

But! The problem with disengaging or ignoring is that we lose our souls. The core of who we are and how we are in the real world. The results are as catastrophic as having elected governments that are corrupt or embarrass; neighbourhoods of strangers; of loneliness and isolation; of being lost in the darkness saying, 'I don't know who I am anymore'.

This is where Mark starts his story.

To a lost, lonely, beaten people he says

Wake up! Make way! There is One who comes with an overflowing Spirit

But you must be awake, you must have your interior house ready;

Throw open the doors to your heart and dust off the welcoming china.

And so we add *Peace* to our supplies for the journey.

Peace is not the absence of conflict but it is a start...

We pray for peace around the world – so many refugees from so many conflicts we can hardly name. We know that war damages both sides and we pray for the soldiers who have been wounded in more ways than we can see. In the absence of conflict peace has a chance to return, crops thrive, people reach their potential.

Peace is not blaming people for harmful behaviour but looking at ways we can help. Treating drug addiction as a medical issue not a criminal one starts to pull the guns from our streets by disenfranchising the black market. It helps people feel safe in their houses freed from petty theft to feed habits. A sense of care and safety in a community brings peace.

And peace around us. When my son was a teenager, we hardly saw each other. He worked night, I worked days... so when the opportunity arose, the first thing out of my mouth would be something like, 'did you clean your room?' He stopped one day and looked me wisely and modelled, 'Good morning Sam, did you sleep well?

Did you have a nice shift?' I realised every conversation started with *my* needs and a demand or a judgement. Now I ask the teller in the bank how her day is going before I make my request. Listen to yourself and try to acknowledge those around us in *their* lives.

To be open to hearing God's voice, we must have silence in our corporal housing. That means finding ways to stop the negative voices in our heads, the *should* haves, the self-criticism, the constant noise. I was once told by a psychologist that once our parents stop nagging us – we take on the role for ourselves. That's where we say things like, 'stupid me'. Peace within us – starts and ends with us making space. Setting times *not* to talk; *not* to be busy to actively *make* quiet.

Finally, I'm going to ask you to *feel* the difference. Without moving from your seat – you can choose to stand. You don't have to wildly mime but I want you to reach inside and *feel* disappointment. Assume the body posture. Let your body fall into position.

Note the movement

Note any comfort/discomfort, awkwardness, any tightness or other sensations.

What is most noticeable?

Now I would like you to slowly move to indifference. Let your body shape what it is like to not care at all, not be part of it or anything. You're on your own.

Freeze. Note the movement from your previous position to this.

Note any comfort/discomfort, awkwardness, any tightness or other sensations.

What is most noticeable?

The last one – move your body into anticipation.

Freeze. Note the movement from your previous position to this.

Note any comfort/discomfort, awkwardness, any tightness and other sensations. What happened?

Can you *feel* the difference? Which would you prefer?

Peace is hard. It is not passive – it takes work. But it is an important supply for Christmas as clearly, this journey will take all the resources we have to be ready. Emmanuel, Lord among us – let us make a manger. A safe and quiet place for you.

And so I pray

Gracious God, I get so agitated, disappointed and fearful with the goings of a growing bunch of leaders with motives and no values. Railing at the TV will not bring peace to the world. And it doesn't help me. Lord, help me channel this energy into passion to carry the words of Jesus to those who need him most.

Amen