

Emergence – when all is gone (Easter Sunday)

Reading John 20: 1-18

When the cross was taken down, only the stories remained. Yesterday, all was lost. In the Easter story, Jesus was dead. His followers were drifting back from whence they came. The stone rolled over and sealed hope into its cave.

When all is gone – all that is left are the stories.

Sometimes, death is not so dramatic. It is a death by a thousand cuts. Beaten down by the small things of life. Pecked to death by little defeats strung together. Locked in our rooms. Poked by living – insecurity, debts, droughts, illness, loneliness or parental lack of sleep. Gnawed by floods, mice but mostly isolation. Birthdays missed, funerals and weddings subdued and unattended, hugs, distant siblings – grandchildren growing up without you. Life is hard – and there's no getting around, it's been harder than ever. We've been in the tomb.

Maybe this is why, at this time of year, we bring out the bunnies, the flowers and the chocolate. Maybe that's why is so important to bring back sporting, spectacles so we can let off steam. We crave distractions from the life we are living.

When your life is over – there is nothing but the stories – and how you are touched. These are the roots and limbs for the telling and re-telling.

First by word of mouth, then, as in the Easter story, by a collection of texts, letters, missives - each describing their own memories and vision. Postcards from the past. Each text was a personal interpretation of what the Jesus story meant in their life and times. The writers reconstructed stories they had been told about events they never saw. Each writer gave *his* unique perspective. Each wrote through the political and historical filter of their lived experience. And each, intentionally or not, reflected their prayers, desires and needs.

As we listen to this ancient story, let's remember it is told through the windows of 3 languages – across migrating cultures and through the political history and physical geography of the world. Yes, even climate change has had an such an impact on the landscape that it no longer looks as it is described in the texts. There were forests where now there are deserts.

There is much truth in the stories but little fact. We read the texts with our hearts, not our minds.

As humans, we can relate to textual emotions in a modern context.

- Hope to hopelessness – we’ve seen freedom rise many times this year only to see it locked down again.
- Loss – some will never get their jobs back or their careers.
- Grief
- Disbelief
- Denial

We can cry with Mary as she thought she had lost the opportunity to lovingly prepare His body and have her private time to say goodbye.

This is a story filled with modern dilemmas:

- misused political power.
- mocking and taunting without respect
- demonising and polarising communities
- cruelty and public scorn
- fear of speaking out and suffering consequences.
- the search for a short-term political response for a problem that was much bigger than the government of the day.

We see these played out in our time. This is a story that can ring in our hearts even for those of no faith.

The Easter story may be 1000s of years old but the human condition screams 2021. Which is why, turning to text for hope is important.

Isaiah promised a feast for *all peoples* – not just Australians or Democrats or Jews; that God would lift the shroud from *all nations* – not just Israel – a God and a resurrection that was understandable to *all people* everywhere. BUT – and there is always a BUT,

You have to let me go.

“Do Not hold onto me” Jesus said to Mary, to his mother, to all people, but (and there is that ‘but again’) go and tell the people. Letting go is the hard part.

How do we let go? Let go of the years of strife; let go of the slights and insults; let go of our anger? Uncoil our clenched fists; let go of our safe caverns... stand up and go back out into the world. Love but let go those we’ve lost; let go of hopelessness and embrace hope. Let go of our pasts.

And at the same time, tell the stories. Enshrine our experiences. Wrap them in glossy paper. Tell and re-tell our stories and the Gospel stories as is our duty.

Do this and remember me.

Just as death can come in small ways – so can resurrection. It doesn't have to be with trumpets or ripping cloth. It can be in small ways and in small stories. Contemporary fables we need to hear.

Once upon a time – There was a ragged man on Oxford Street. I too was on Oxford street: 21 years old and my life seemed over. I was deserted, homeless and broke. This man had a purpose. I did not. I was alone in a foreign place with no family and no community. He staggered and swayed but his objective was fixed and I was the centre of his attention.

In the olden days, Oxford street was a seedy place of pimps and prostitutes. There were lots of methos - that is, people who drank methylated spirits because it was cheaper than grog. They drank in doorways and alleyways and were virtually the décor of Surry Hills before it became gentrified. Many were homeless. Many were veterans. All of them had stories to tell.

This man had a determination in fierce rebellion to his body's zigzagging. He walked as if the earth was a rolling ship. His intent on me unbroken by the imaginary diversions or the crowd. By sheer willpower, he finally reached me and straightened to his full height and steadied himself. He looked me in the eye and said, "Keep fit and keep living because you're going to be dead a long time!". A special message from the prophet of Oxford Street. In case I didn't get it, he held my gaze and repeated it, louder.

Message delivered, he continued on his way, saying nothing to anyone else. I turned around. I turned my life around. He is not forgotten.

And there are other stories of resurrection that might ring true to you.

Jennifer Garrison Brownell tells a story about driving home on a particularly bad day. She felt pecked to death and at the end of her wits, when, for no explicable reason, she stopped the car when she saw a woman sitting on the curb staring intently into a drainage grate.

The woman pointed at a chirping flock of ducklings perched on the edge of a PVC pipe that emptied into a cloudy square of water under the grate. A mallard nearby called and walked in nervous circles. The duck must have been crossing

the road, and walked over the grate, when the chicks following her fell through. She was too big to get in, and they were too small to get out.

After a bit, a man arrived and began pulling ducklings out of the pipe. Apparently, mallards can't count very high, because as soon as Mother duck had four, she collected them under her wings, waddled toward the nearby creek and floated downstream.

The man was still pulling ducklings out of the pipe, so Jennifer got hold of one before it wandered away. Suddenly she noticed that all the day's annoyances had been forgotten as she lay down in the mud by the stream and set that fluffy, trembling little body in the water, to paddle away with its family.

She says that we think that resurrection, when it comes, will come with trumpets and earthquakes and angels perched cheekily on stones. But sometimes it's not one big death, but a thousand small ones that bury you. You are witness, too, to the resurrection that comes as a flutter of life, so tiny you can hold in your hand. And when you stand up dripping mud and maybe tears, you will find it's not just another life that's been saved, it's your own.

Resurrection is disturbing. It says that you can't always understand, it may not be what you think it is ...but you are not immune. It is not about facts but what happens in your heart. It is about what was, and wasn't, and is again. Different.

When Simon Peter searched the tomb, only the linen was left. Shed like a snake's skin – that should have been a hint. A snake emerges from the old skin new. When larvae break through their chrysalis, they become moths and butterflies. The world is full of resurrection beauty...
And you are too.

So, when all is gone – look for the stories. Arise from the crusty words anew.
Amen

God of surprises, who springs up where least expected, show me the stories that we can tell and retell for our revival.