

Emergence- on the road to God

Readings: Genesis 9:8-17; Joel 2:12-14; Peter 3:18-22; Mark 1:9-15

Margaret Silf tells a story about dragon flies. Now it appears that dragon fly larvae live under the water – like tadpoles. There they are swimming around in their little larvae families as happy as Larry...(or Loretta's) and then one day, some of their mates disappear. Now if you were a larva, you might think your friends have died. They are certainly no longer with you. It leads one to wonder, what happens when you die? What's on the other side?

Of course, you and I know that the larvae become dragon flies who hover above the water and wonder where their friends went. They can't return to down-under. They have a dragonfly destiny awaiting them – to make other dragonflies – who will become larvae. Perhaps they hesitate and marvel how they might describe this wonderful future to those they have left behind. But I think not.

Lent is the journey to the cross and beyond. We don't stop at the cross – we move through it to the light of Sunday... and beyond.

A pilgrim stops and appreciates every step. The listen to their senses.

I am proposing that this Lenten journey be just that – a road towards God, no matter what stands in the way. It *should* be a bumpy road – life is. It *should* have its moments of uncertainty, possible self-loathing or regret. I see these as normal temptations in a wilderness. We don't need to be tempted with offerings of kingdoms or super-powers ...we sabotage ourselves. Let's go as Kenneth Samuel put it so elegantly, "ashes to action, dust to determination" towards our god.

I'd like to see Lent used as a trial of a different sort. We've given up enough over the last 12 months. How about taking something up: An opportunity to trial different practices. Practices that make you face your own temptations. Setting yourself a goal. Maybe testing a new practice like:

- Saying a gratefulness prayer every night before sleep – for 40 days
- Journaling – where is God? At least once a week – for 4 weeks
- Listening/reading the daily scripture before you have breakfast – and leave 5-10 minutes to think about it
- Writing a love poem every afternoon or

- Meditating for 20 minutes every day

These are just a few suggestions.

Because I see Lent as a journey towards God. One foot in front of the other. And like all good journeys, discipline will get you there but being mindfulness and flexibility give you experiences beyond your imagination.

Why? Because in the scripture God makes promises to us. The point of Genesis reading is the covenant. Never again, the Almighty declares...and just to make sure you get the point, I will hang a rainbow as a sign, all will be well. This passage is particularly significant to eco-theologists as it lays it out in black and white that his love and His promise is *for all living creatures of every kind and all life on earth*. If God is making promises – *when do we make ours?*

The Peter reading – which we skipped but it is in your Pew Sheets – tells us that suffering is part of life – it just is. And in fact, without it, we would not be the creatures that are capable of grief, compassion and empathy. That suffering is necessary to fulfil God's plan – I'm not so sure about that. I know that it is based on the idea that God sacrificed Jesus. It doesn't matter what I feel about different interpretations, I accept there are many theologies. I *do* know that our ability to love deeply is also the source of our grief. As a chaplain, I have seen those who love lavishly while their special one is alive, have an easier grief than others with regrets.

I believe God loves lavishly.

In Mark's reading, Jesus is baptised and the Spirit descends 'like a dove' awash with purpose. God makes his feelings known and then hurls Jesus out into the desert. You heard me right, hurls. I am told the translation comes from the Greek word 'Ekballo', which is the same word used to describe casting out demons. Throw, cast, toss, hurl – all same thing: Expel with force. Luke and Matthew are more coy about this movement, 'Jesus was led into the desert'... but remember Mark was first. He wrote the script, the others elaborated. Matthew and Luke also make a song and dance about the temptations – going into great detail. Mark covers them in one sentence. He is much more focussed on the wilderness and the wild animals. In other words, for Mark, it's the journey, not the stops that matter.

And hey! That's what I say about Lent. I'll buy Peter's point that no journey is without difficulties. And God knew, as Jesus did, that he was a marked man. The journey was going to be difficult and inevitable. He was sent to set things on their ear – there would be consequences. But what if, like the Joel reading, God is calling us to Him. "Rend your heart – not your garments" means open your heart and stop beating yourself up. As you know rending garments is about displaying your grief. Let go. Open your heart. Return to the Lord.

And God did not send Jesus alone or unprotected. He was unharmed by the wild animals – and he had the angels to 'attend' him. Again, the Greek text uses a word I do know *Diaconicon* for the word translated as 'attend'. (or in some translations 'serve') The *Diokonia* is to serve – as Deacons, healing, finding paths, caring, enabling.

Now volunteers and Deacons do what the angels did.

I know there are those who struggle with Easter. I would like to reframe that to say, we *should* wrestle with Easter. Many Christian's entire faith rests on the death and resurrection while others are based on the life of Jesus. They focus on what He said, what he taught and are slightly uncomfortable with the whole death thing. There is a tension between those who interpret events physically and those who engage with them metaphorically. It is different for each of us and that's OK. Lent is the journey that affords the time to wrestle with what is real for you and what is uncomfortable – and why. These struggles only deepen our faith because it makes it real.

To me, it is not all about Good Friday or Easter Sunday, it is the light that shines through – from the other side.

Our faith gives us the power to be dragon flies and see through the murky waters to the life above. Let's let Lent be our emergence for all that has been to what might be.

Amen