

Leftover and still in our cups

Geoff hands out the rocks. Not St Stephens day.... So hang onto them.

Put simply, our 3 readings today have 4 messages

- Take only what you need
- Serving is a privilege – not an entitlement
- Do not judge or think yourself more worthy
- It doesn't matter when you arrived – you are equally loved.

That's it! We can go home now.

Is it enough?

The South African humourist, Trevor Noah, said when he was a kid, his mom dragged him to 3 churches every Sunday. It was bad enough when they had a car but when the car was broken, they bussed across town for hours and sometimes in danger. You see, Trevor was white-*ish* and his mother was black, very black. They were noticed wherever they went.

The reason they went to 3 churches was that Trevor's Mama thought each gave them something different.

The first church offered jubilant praise of the Lord. The second church offered deep analysis of the scripture, which his mum loved. The third church offered passion and catharsis; it was a place where you truly felt the presence of the Holy spirit within you.

As Trevor got older, he noticed that each church "had its own distinct racial makeup:

- jubilant church was mixed;
- analytical church was white
- and passionate, cathartic church was black church."

I believe Church should be all those things I believe that church should make us think and feel and give us something to feel good about. .. Of course, we can't be all things all the time but ..

to sit in awe when I hear an amazing preacher challenging me, making me uncomfortable and leaving me with thoughts that float throughout the coming week – wow! . That was worth it.

And then the humble joy, the deep spiritual enrichment that comes from an ancient rituals such as communion. The thought that millions of people all over the world are sharing the same sacrament, the same supper. It nearly makes me cry every time.

And I never felt so blessed in all my life when I was anointed by an Aboriginal Congress Community before my ordination. Dripping in oil, smelling the sweat and feeling the movement, bathed in loud, lengthy prayer. It was a life changing experience. The white fella's ordination literally paled beside it.

For me – worship must stimulate the *whole* being. That's why I miss our lusty singing. I have heard congregations raise the roof. I could *feel* the worship.

To me - Church services are not a ritual we endure so we can get on to the important business of catching up with each other. To me, the catching up is part of the worship.

Because I believe worship is a shared, intimate experience that should change our relationships *because* we share it. That's why we break bread. I believe it should feed and stimulate *all* of our senses – be literally embodied so that we can 'shout' for praise and joy.

When I say 'shout' I mean it, of course, in our restrained Australian way. but if you are prone to a little 'hooting and hollering' don't hold back.

But first, the **Word** – our readings today, that's our rock and where we return for wisdom. In reverse – from the last reading to the first...

Last week the parable of the ungrateful servant was a stern warning to the disciples about seeing themselves having some priestly privilege. Forgiveness was god's gift – they are the conveyor, not the judge and jury. It is hard but they/we have no choice because God will judge us.

This week – the same message – *don't* feel so entitled – *don't* judge and the story takes us a rung deeper.

Those that came early and those that came late. Why do you think they were still there in the square? They could represent the unwanted. It would be natural for the Landowners to take the young and the strong first. They would also take the hard workers they knew. The people left in the afternoon were literally the leftovers: too old; too young, women with babies; the weak and ill. The not-so-good. And still, our biblical landowner swept them up.

The message in big black letters is ...

It *doesn't* matter if you joined the Church early or whether you arrived today – you are equally loved. It doesn't matter if you are strong or weak, male or female...you are welcome here.

Again this week, the lesson that the last will be first...a covert signal once again to a) not get too full of ourselves (or disciples) and b) be not a judge – forgive. There is no hierarchy of blessedness.

Paul tells us it is a privilege to serve.

And exodus is about obeying the Lord and to take only what you need. (even when it comes to toilet paper) Appreciate the Lord's abundance and you will be rewarded.

And finally, to give generously and equally without judgement. The readings take us on a weekly journey and even as we know how the story ends and begins and ends again, it is a contemplative walk where we discover new voices, new ideas and mile posts we have never noticed before.

I would like worship that stimulates our thoughts and feelings and yes, even questions and uneasiness. I know last week – wasn't easy. It was a deep and troubling subject **But** when someone made a reflective comment to me 3 days later, I knew I had done my job.

I will try my best to offer a variety of opportunities for deep thinking, questioning, contemplative and celebratory worship. To do this, I will try to engage the intellect, imagination and all the senses.

Take the rock in your hand for example,

The first experience is that it was offered, given freely by a stranger and you trustingly accepted. That is worship. (I'll repeat that)

Next, hold it in your hand, familiarise yourself, introduce yourself, get to know its colours, texture, lumps and bumps – Really, *really* look at it. **Pause**

Is that what God does with you? Accepts you in curiosity and wonder, exploring your inner fortitude; Sees the colours that make you tick.

Then let's engage our imaginations. The rock could be a symbol of:

- The church foundation – is that you?
- It might be heavy in your hand like grief

- It connects you to this ancient land – eons in your hand, a piece of the universe before human kind; a piece of God’s imagination
- It could remind you of the stewardship of our first peoples who recognised rocks for what they were, symbols, places, tools, gifts, part of the spirit of the land
- It may be a river rock – a journey, a timeless ever-changing story. The water that is never in any place again, never returns but the rock remains or travels slowly

On a more earthly reflection:

- Perhaps this rock was gathered by child labour – the only income a family could muster
- The rock is out of place – does it illustrate the destruction of an environment or habitat? What is it doing in church? Am I culpable?
- **(Pause)**

Now as your mind has wandered – oh yes, you have seen the cups behind me. I know you’re curious. Perhaps your heart leapt. After all, this would normally be communion day. These are the symbols of all the communions you have shared in all the places. The one vivid experience we are denied today – or are we?

As we have awakened our imaginations with our rocks, why not experience communion? If you please, Put your rock down and stand up.

Place one hand on your heart...place two fingers on your lips and turn to those close to you and lift you fingers off your lips and open your hand– sharing and eye to eye moment of communion. Feel it in your gut – communion. The meeting of hearts – joining us to Jesus and to Christians everywhere. One supper.

Can you join me in whole-hearted worship?

Trevor Noah went to live in the ghetto. He found a place there and he said, "The hood was strangely comforting, but comfort can be dangerous. Comfort provides a floor but also a ceiling. In our crew, our friend G was like the rest of us, unemployed, hanging out. Then he got a job at a nice clothing store. Every morning he went to work, and the guys would tease him about going to work. We’d see him headed out all dressed up, and everyone would be laughing at him. “Oh, G, look at you in your fancy clothes!” “Oh, G, going to go see the

white man today, huh?" "Oh, G, don't forget to bring some books back from the library!"¹

You pretty well know the end of the story. He sabotaged his job and got fired. The alternative was to have no community. He conformed to the norm.

Christians stood out from the Hood. They dared to be different and then over time conformity and seniority became the norm. Some congregations built themselves a Hood.

But not this church!

We're not afraid. Let's feed our senses. We will sing lustily (when we are allowed again); and use our whole bodies, gifts and souls to praise the Lord. You proffer hope to the community. You used your gifts make the Manse a home.

I ask again,
Will you join me??

Now you can do your hooting and hollering.

I pray – it's a new day. Some of us have come early and some of us late but I know your love is boundless. Give us the courage to reciprocate with whole-hearted love. Amen

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Exodus 16:2-15
Philippians 1:21-20
Matthew 20:1-16

¹ (from "Born A Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood" by Trevor Noah)