

Unprecedented love

J Shannon

Readings: 2 Kings 2:1-12; 2 Cor 4:3-6 & Mark 9:2-9

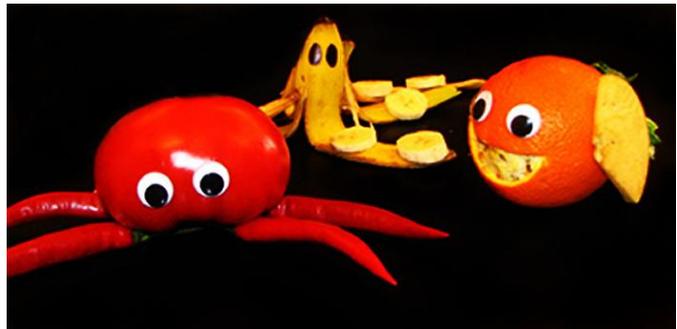
I'm just putting it out there but it seems to me that Genesis 2:18-25 would have made more sense on Valentine's Day than the Transfiguration. The Genesis story describes how God made Adam and so he wouldn't be alone –made the animals. It is written that Adam could call them what he liked.

When that didn't solve Adam's loneliness problem, God made Eve. And Adam named her 'Wo-man' – a little unimaginative, don't you think? But much more on the theme of love and companionship.

As God gave man permission to name things, my husband told the children those things that hop around the paddocks are called Jaboingers – because that's what they do.

My Dad, recognising that there is a long, *long period*, a lifetime, stretching between school holidays, invented Kookamongo hunting season. My brother and I would create elaborate traps with balls of string. We would weave web- like creations from the bedpost to the door; to the closet doorknob to the curtain rail and so on about the room. We rarely caught anything the first couple of nights so we would improve the webs with intricate detail until at last, we would wake up one morning and there would be not one but TWO Kookamongos. ¹

They looked like this. Only not as elaborate. A Banana with raisin eyes and grape feet. Or an apple with a pineapple ring halo, toothpick arms and raisin hands. My father was imaginative, but not terrific on execution. We were delighted! Every ONE was unique. Every year was unprecedented!



The Lake Superior State University put "Unprecedented" on its 2021 banned list for words overused and unwarranted in public discourse. Almost every day last year, a journalist or commentator would describe screwy events or presidential actions as 'unprecedented'.

¹ As an adult, I found out that Kookamongo (also spelled Cookamonga) is a Californian airport for small planes 40 miles out of LA– and also in some Mexican slang, means crazy like the Yiddish word 'Mashugana'.

Phewa Langeni tells me that life really is a long series of unprecedented units strung together. Last year was unprecedented – as was the year before. “Every single day of any future or past year is unlike any others you’ve ever experienced”.

And Phewa says, “The face of overwhelming unprecedentedness, threatens to derail everything we know.” Which is a nice way of saying, it’s flipping us out. It’s no wonder people are coming out of 2020 confused and unmotivated. Phewa said, we need to get back to centring, prayer and rest...and the cycle of these things. I would add that we need to kickstart routines that shape what God needs us to do in this world.

So it is as Corinne opens the Op Shop more and more towards normal – and dance and Thai Chi have started again. Fellowship is a must after isolation. We just have to figure it out.

Phiwa says, “if no one has said it recently, you are loved. You are enough” You are doing your best even as you are feeling your worst. With God in every slice of time, we can and must re-precedent, (RE-PRESIDENT) these days and weeks, months, years ahead.”

We will never have a summer like this again – until we do. We will never have these readings in this combination – until we do.

And so, we have our readings – the high before we descend into Lent. The readings are about highs and lows; light and darkness and fear before joy. They work hard making the historical links.

To begin, Elijah parting the Jordon is *supposed* to remind you of Moses. Elijah is taken up to heaven. Gosh, that never happened before. It’s unprecedented – until, of course, Jesus ascends in a similar fashion, and later, Mohamed did too.

The common point between the OT and NT readings is that Elisha is afraid to be abandoned and has little confidence in himself. He struggles with the idea that his master will be taken. Just as Jesus tries again and again to tell the disciples what will happen. What must happen. But they cling to denial.

Jesus took Peter, James and John up on a high mountain – where they were all alone. Moses spoke to God on the Mountain. In fact, just about every bit of enlightenment or Godly communications seems to happen on a mountain. In Business language, we call it the helicopter view. Up on the mountain gives you time to reflect; To see the Big picture.

On the mountain, three things happen:

First - there is a moment when they look at Him – Jesus...and see him in a totally different light. Putting dazzlingly aside, putting aside whiter than any bleach ...

Let's skip back St Valentines Day. Do you remember the first time you looked at someone and you saw them in a totally different light? Think of it.

When you realise the ordinary person you grew up with; or was your best friend; the kid next door – or in my case, the guy with the office across the hall was actually so much more than that? Love does strange things to our vision. Does it not? We describe people in love as glowing.

John, Peter and James have travelled with Jesus. They have done his beck and call. They have sat at the feet of a learned teacher but today – they saw something different. They saw him for the first time: read, Gob-smacking awe as they stood back. Whatever is the Aramaic equivalent of Holy Moley!

Then – Elijah and Moses appear. Mark doesn't tell us what the 3 of them are talking about. To my mind, Jesus may have just needed to have a conversation with men who have done hard jobs for God. These are people who know about calling; about being given an impossible task; – what it's like to be guided by the unexplainable, invisible almighty. Maybe Jesus needed encouragement... or advice. Tell me Moses, how do you lead people through an uncomfortable or even terrifying mission? How did you convince them to follow you? Tell me Elijah, did you sometimes feel alone? How did you manage your work-life balance?

If we sneak a peek at Luke's gospel, it tells us what they were talking about (Luke 9:28) They are talking about his death. As if seeing Jesus talking to two dead guys wasn't obvious enough. Did he ask them how they found the courage? Did He ask them why it must be so? The transfiguration is definitely the high before the low. And the future is being written before the Disciples in whopping big letters but denial is strong medicine.

Rev Rachel Hackenberg says perhaps this week's story is an invitation to talk to each other – and even with God about the hard things in our own lives. Even our endings.

Valentines Day is a good time to do that. Poor old St Valentine was martyred for ministering to persecuted Christians under Roman rule. He talked to them. He walked with them in difficult times. He listened to them.

And THEN – the 3rd thing happened – Just when Peter is scurrying around in fear suggesting they build temples to them all (how Roman is that?), a cloud descends and a just like at the Baptism, a voice booms from above. This time God says, “This is my son, whom I love. **Listen to him!**”

Don't be dazzled, listen to Him. Don't just look at his deeds – listen to what he is saying.

I might be wrong but I think some people are dazzled by the deeds and not entirely sure what He said.

And as far as love is concerned, perhaps if I was less dazzled and more mindful of what was said, I might not have made some mistakes.

Meanwhile

Peter's running around leaping to permanent solutions is perhaps a reminder that it is better to *be* – and *stay*- in the moment than build monuments. Perhaps, unlike Adam, he doesn't have the gift of naming things...so he sprang into action. Are we listening to those we love? Or are we *doing* stuff?

Both of stories describe terror and uncertainty, followed by joy – and both stories stress that trials (and sometimes suffering) must be endured to bear fruit.

So even if the veil of romanticism has slipped away – and you dumped your beloved. Or better still, as you see them with your shining eyes, bright and wonderful – love is preceded – it is earthly and it will come again. It is a gift from God that we can and do and do again, but it is not consumable. It may or may not be finite in the moment. Many love stories end. But love doesn't.

Late in life, Bishop Spong married Christine and after that he passionately proselytised, “love lavishly”. Like the blessings that grow on trees – the more you love lavishly, the more enriched your heart will be.

And there **is** one love that is truly unprecedented. It came when God first put his breath into Adam, into us. It is, always and will be the love of God, the love of Christ, undefeatable, infinite, inclusive and forgiving. Love before time. We are but a reflection of that greatness.

Creator, redeemer and sustainer – knowing your love has allowed me to be loved. Give me the courage to love lavishly no matter what happens. Jesus' love was the source of his courage – let it be so in me. Amen.