

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday – 15 September 2024 - The Sixteenth Sunday of Trinity

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Isaiah 50. 4-9a; Psalm 116. 1-8; James 3. 1-12; Mark 8. 27-38

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd David Newton, Diocesan Director of Ordinands

One fish swam past another and said, 'morning, nice clear water today, isn't it'. The other kept swimming and thought, 'what on earth is water?'

That second little fish had no notion of sea, or sky, or soil. It had no ability to see what was all around it; no ability to see the water in which it swam.

It's hard to see our own context, our own frame of reference. We just take it for granted. We become oblivious to it. But each of us has a particular perspective, a unique way of looking at something; we are shaped by our own context.

Matthew Syed tells of a wonderful social science experiment in his book *Rebel Ideas*. A group of Americans and a group of Japanese are both asked to watch a short video. It shows an underwater scene with some fish. The groups were then asked what they saw. In general terms, the Americans noted the particular fish, one swam off screen to the left, another to the top right, one was blue, etc. The Japanese noted the setting. The sea was this kind of colour, it was shallow, the movement of the fish suggested a strong current, etc.

The two groups were looking at the same scene, and yet they saw different things. Each of us is shaped by our cultural context, by big ideas and stories, to "read" the world in particular ways.

Sometimes, these alternative perspectives may just be that – alternative. They might be morally neutral and diverse ways of "reading" the world around us. Two people enter a forest, one gazes up to the canopy and sees a bird's nest, the vast span of an oak tree, and a squirrel jumping from branch to branch. The other looks down, and sees unusual mushroom heads, an entrance into a badger's set, and a trail of ants with leaves on their backs. Clearly, neither perspective is better or worse. They simply see different things; they read the same scene differently.

But sometimes these alternative perspectives provide better or worse ways at looking at the world. The big ideas and stories, that shape the lenses we see through, can align us with the Way the Truth and the Life, or they can distort and pervert our vision.

Our Gospel story this morning is all about alternative perspectives, about good and bad ways of “reading” the words and life of Christ.

Jesus begins by asking his closest disciples who people say that he is. They respond by offering a variety of alternative perspectives. Some say you are Elijah; some say you are John the Baptist, but we say, ‘you are the messiah’. From hanging out with Jesus they have had their perspective shifted, they have different lenses through to see – correctly – that Jesus is the messiah.

But then we discover that although they’ve got the right designation, they have still completely failed to understand what it means. Jesus outlines what it really means to be the messiah – to suffer, to die, and be raised. And Peter says, surely this cannot be. He has a particular notion of what it is to be the messiah. The stories and big ideas of the Hebrew Bible and Midrash of the day have shaped his thinking. And there is no way – in his mind – that the messiah might end up crucified and cursed upon a tree.

Jesus gives an upside-down reading of what it is to be the messiah.

He then goes on to give an alternative perspective to what it means to walk in the way of Life. Those who lose their life will save it, he says. Or again, he says, what use is it to gain the whole world, but forfeit your soul. To find life, Jesus says, is not about having an abundance of possessions, or about focusing on self-realisation. Life is found in giving it away. Life is found when you’re not looking for it.

None of this makes much sense to the disciples prior to Jesus’ death and resurrection. They are left baffled and confused. Perhaps the disciples’ own confusion gives us a clue as to why they were not allowed to tell others that Jesus was the messiah. Perhaps most other people – shaped as they were by the Jewish traditions of the day – might also have failed to understand what it really meant for Jesus to be the messiah. They would have utterly misread his identity.

But after the resurrection that all changes. Suddenly the disciples have new lenses with which to see the world and make sense of life. Suddenly, rather than keep the messianic secret, they are shouting about Jesus from the rooftops. They now have a new way of seeing, a new story and big idea which shapes how they see everything else.

The challenge for us today is to have that same resurrection perspective; to be people who read the world in light of the resurrection. Amid a myriad of alternative ways of seeing any situation, we should be people who “read” all of life through the resurrection.

We are to read the concerns and questions and problems of our society and the world, through the life and light of the resurrection.

I cannot tell you what reading life in this way means you should think or do about this or that. Instead, I simply leave us with a question. As you are confronted by the news of the day: the personal and communal stuff, as well as the political, the societal, and the international, ask yourself, ‘what might it mean to “read” this in life of resurrection hope?’

This is the perspective we can offer, the lens through which we can read the world.

Amen.

Ways to Engage all Generations

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder why Jesus told his disciples to keep his identity a secret?
- I wonder how you feel about the idea of taking up your cross?
- I wonder what the resurrection means to you?

Suggested intercessions

O God, with faces touched by the light of a new day,
and hearts warmed by our prayers and praises,
we come before you to pray
for the needs of our world.

Into the light of the resurrection
we raise those who are struggling with illness,
with despair over their lives, or with
the breakdown of relationships.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.

Into the light of the resurrection
we bring those places in our world
where war, violence, poverty and need
are the experiences of everyday life. (These places may be named)
May the light of Christ shine upon them.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.

Into the light of the resurrection
we bring the headline news of this weekend (this may be named):
we hold in our hearts the pain
of those suffering violence, bereavement or conflict.
May the light of Christ shine upon them.

May the light of Christ shine upon them.

Into the light of the resurrection
we bring ourselves, the private struggles,
the heart's yearnings, the hidden dreams,
the unfulfilled potential.

May the light of Christ shine upon us.

May the light of Christ shine upon us. AMEN.

~adapted from, Ann Siddall, in *Lent to Easter liturgies: Year C*. Posted on the website of the **Stillpoint Spirituality Centre**. <http://stillpoint.unitingchurchsa.org.au/>

Suggested hymns/songs

Lord the Light of your Love (Shine, Jesus Shine)

Ye servants of God, your Master proclaim

Will you come and follow me

We are marching in the light of God

Love's redeeming work is done

See what a morning, gloriously bright

Alleluia, Alleluia, hearts to heaven and voices raise

Take my life and let it be

Activities to accompany the service:

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- reflectionary.org – lectionary-based resources
- engageworship – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)