

REFLECTION 3.2.13 by Piers Booth

Based on the readings

Jeremiah 1:4-10, Luke 4:21-30 & A Parable (p160 In Defence of Doubt¹)

I am excited!

I wish there could be a trumpet fanfare, or a roll of drums!

We at St James have started a new eraa new beginning..... a new pilgrimage in our live as a faith community as followers of Jesus.

Towards the end of last year, St James, that's us, you and me, went through a period of trauma:

A time when we started to realise we had run out of money.

A difficult period when Presbytery conducted a "Life and Witness Review" of the congregation.

We, at St James found that for the immediate future there will no longer be a minister.

But we are over the holiday period and now, it is the time to plan for the future!

I am excited!

Because.....this is an opportunity for you, all of you and me, to explore the faith of Jesus again.

A time to explore what it means to be a follower of Jesus, I quote from Rex Hunt's recent book, "Against the Stream": "A Progressive Christian is a response to the vision and efforts and life of the Galilean sage we call Jesus or Yeshua, without the baggage of Christological beliefs unnecessarily added by the church."

A time, to listen to Rabbi Arthur Waskow, a progressive Jewish Rabbi, who says, we need to "find new richness and new meaning in old teachings, and create new forms of prayer that stir us into action."

A time to re-explore our beliefs, based on Community, Compassion for others and Radical Inclusive Hospitality for all.

A time to push boundaries.

¹ The excerpt from *In Defence of Doubt* can be found at the end of this reflection.

The other book I have read, since Christmas, has been Val Webb's "In Defence of Doubt". I quote from the book "Doubt is not ignorance or lack of faith or understanding. It is the nagging question that still remains despite great attempts to solve the problem". End of quote.

Questioning, as the result of doubt, has with the sciences in all its branches brought about the discoveries and the advances throughout the history of humankind.

Without asking questions and testing new ways of doing things, we would still be living in caves.

Doubt, leading to asking questions, is just as relevant in our quest for understanding of theology, and finding the genuine teachings of Jesus.

My first doubt in my journey as a Follower of Jesus was the various theories of atonement, to explain the execution of Jesus. The very fact there were several theories makes all of them suspect. Surely Jesus was crucified because he was seen as a rebel, by the Temple Authorities and the Romans. Why, then, do we have this suggestion that Jesus' death was a sacrifice for our benefit?

It is never easy to accept change and new ideas!

It so easy to look back at the way things were done in the past. Ways that we were comfortable with, but no longer seems to work as well today. Yet unless we have doubts about their efficacy in the future, we will never explore and experiment.

Yes, Jeremiah, in the Old Testament reading, had doubts as to his abilities for the task ahead. Yet, supported by the spirit of God, he was a significant, if dissident voice in the Jewish community prior to the exile of the Jews into Babylon.

The people in Nazareth had doubts about Jesus as a prophet, because they were not prepared to have open minds. They were not able to see new possibilities, a new vision.

There were doubts expressed by some of the people living by the stream. They rediscovered the true significance of the freely given water from the stream, and broke the men-given rules.

Jesus had doubts about the validity of the rules laid down by the temple authorities. He had a vision for a compassionate society, with radical inclusive hospitality.

Jesus broke the rules! * What rules should St James break, in developing a new vision for the future?

*

Only we, you and me, all of us together, can build a new vision for this congregation, St James. In the end, it will be our collective ideas, all of us, which will create this vision. One we develop, as pilgrims, as we journey through time with much discussion. Accepting some ideas and rejecting others.

Can we, all of us together, have visions? * I believe so!

Perhaps our visions can be derived from those recently developed for Darwin Cathedral and Washington National Cathedral. Yes I realise we are not a cathedral, nor do we have a magnificent building, but both visions include the development of relevant worship, recognition of other faiths, and outreach to the wider community.

Yes, I believe we can have visions! Do you?

Question.

As a start in vision making, how do we continue to build a vibrant community, full of compassion for others, and exploring radical hospitality for all?

- **Third Reading**
-
- **A Parable**
- **(from In Defence of Doubt, by Val Webb, p160-1)**
-
- Once upon a time, the gods gave a stream to the people telling them that, if they drank, they would find peace and happiness. The people drank and then gathered to share their experiences. They told the next village and others came to drink. The community grew. Some were appointed to build steps down to the stream, to help with foot traffic and roster each individual's

time at the stream. One man took charge (for the good of the whole, of course) and gathered a group around him to study why people felt good after drinking, how they came to be there and what was the best way to drink. Only the chosen could be in this discussion - and no women, for some reason. The group soon argued about true meanings and formed different camps. The dominant camp pooh-poohed all the other stories and began to regulate who was eligible to drink, according to correct belief and purity of heart and body. They also declared that they could drink on behalf of those not eligible. Trouble brewed between the strict letter-of-the-lawyers and the pragmatic compassionates, the former regularly blocking the steps against the latter, often with violence. Of course, claims from passing travellers of similar streams in *other* places were dismissed as false or inferior.

-
- After a long time, the old people began to talk, out of earshot of leaders, about when the gods first gave them the stream. Some even looked into a dusty file in the archives recording the event. They discovered, to their surprise, in the beginning, *everyone* could drink freely and equally by divine order and that the rules and explanations constructed over time were not in the file. They challenged the leaders - to no avail or with limited concessions granted. Some simply trudged further upstream where the banks were not patrolled and knelt to drink together, passing cups of water to the too young and the too old. Downstream, their relatives continued to take turns on the steps and obey the rules. As Jesus said after he told a parable, "Those that have ears to hear, let them hear".