

3RD SUNDAY YEAR A HOMILY 2020 AUSTRALIA DAY

Lk 4.12-23 Is 8.23-9.3 1Cor 1.10-17

So, finally we get into Matthew's Gospel with the public ministry of Jesus opening in multi-cultural Galilee and not nationalistic Jerusalem. It is said that the population of the area around the Sea of Galilee (known as *'the circle of the Gentiles'*) was a diverse mixture of Gentiles and Jews, and it is significant that Jesus takes off from here, and not at the heart of Jewish culture and worship in Jerusalem, although there may have been method in his madness, not wanting to draw too much attention to himself and his message, knowing the attitudes of the Temple Police and general religious and maybe political leaders, too. The fact is that his message was revolutionary for its time, not in terms of overthrow of governments or religious institutions in themselves, but for the sake of challenging those in authority for their inconsistency, hypocrisy and lack of compassion for the common person, particularly those in trouble.

Here we have Jesus mixing with the locals, living with, understanding and empathizing with them, far from being a haranguing prophet, talking down to them and berating them for their weaknesses and sins. He makes no judgements, but reaches out and offers enlightenment, help and hope, particularly to those in trouble, illness and despair, from the start. And so we have the image of Jesus bringing light into their lives, as, like John the Baptist, now arrested, and off the main scene, as Jesus moves into being the centre of attention, but on the move.

Then comes the call, not just to the first apostles, but to all, to hear his message and to belong to this disparate community of people seeking faith and meaning in their lives. He is in the midst of diversity, with pagan and Jewish worship, bilingual, with spoken Greek and Aramaic, but we can easily miss this reality, as we are accustomed to just hearing about the call, and not the circumstances surrounding the first apostles at the time.

It is also suggested by the Jerome Biblical Commentary that the whole account is *'telescoped'*, with the dropping of everything by the 2 sets of brothers, Peter and Andrew, and James and John (*interestingly, names that have stood the test of time, although John seems to have fallen off the perch in more recent times!*). There is the background issue of family responsibilities, with wives and presumably children to take care of, even though we hear nothing of that until Peter's mother-in-law turns up later! There must have been a time after an initial encounter with Jesus, for reflection, rearrangement of priorities and then balancing time for following Jesus and providing for ongoing support in family life, behind the scenes described by the Gospel authors, who focussed on the person and message of Jesus, not all the practical details.

(Can you imagine how Zebedee would have felt if he had suddenly lost not just one hard working son, but two at once, left behind to fix and cast the nets by himself. Wouldn't he and those working with Peter and Andrew have come after them with a vengeance, to stop them just walking away into a fantasy world free of all responsibility?)

In fact, the symbolism of nets could well be connected to worldly entanglements, ensnaring all of us, and the letting them go, a reflection of freedom which comes, as we keep our minds on what is truly important in life and faith being lived out or applied. We hear the stories again and again, as the cycle of the liturgical years roll around, but isn't this like ourselves, as we continue the daily, weekly, monthly, annual activities, with much mundane repetition, and yet the ongoing need to continue to make right and good decisions, and to adapt and change, according to the circumstances in which we find ourselves, at the various phases and stages of life? The call to discipleship goes on, as we follow him too, akin to the first disciples we hear of today.

A further call is now, as we commemorate or observe Australia Day. I believe it is a good thing to reflect on its meaning, not only to see the good things that have come from the time of European settlement, but also to appreciate the broader history and significance of the indigenous people or First Nations of this country we all call home, and whose home it was for tens of thousands of years prior, as truly ancient history, which was ignored and misunderstood for so long.

There was the 1967 Referendum for inclusion in the census and right to vote, at last, then the Redfern Speech of 1992 – Year for the World's Indigenous People, then the National Apology of 2008, concerning the Stolen Generations in particular, and the land rights High Court decisions of Mabo and Wik, making progress towards addressing the wrongs of the past, and denouncing the doctrine of *Terra Nullius*, that the land belonged to no-one! And there were the so called 'Frontier Wars', where massacres occurred, the historical facts too often conveniently swept under the carpet, and forgotten, or even denied!

During the week, I heard a fascinating interview with historian and author (*"The Law of the Land"*, among many others now) Henry Reynolds, who recalled starting off teaching Australian history in Townsville in the 1960's, with a textbook that hardly even mentioned the original inhabitants of this land. In culpable ignorance, a blind eye was turned towards the aboriginal people, described in a 1901 encyclopaedia thus: ***"Naturally savages of the lowest kind, absolutely naked, ignorant of the use of all metals, having no houses and rarely attempting to cultivate the ground. But in the course of time, these aborigines will inevitably fade away, and the civilization here at Sydney will characterize all the mighty area of Australia"!!***

And yet, I lived in Manly NSW for 12 years, named after first Governor Arthur Philip spoke of the aboriginal men he saw walking near North Head as '*manly*', stating: ***"Their confidence and manly behaviour made me give the name of Manly Cove to this place"***, and who in some ways tried to understand and respect them in the first place. In Cooktown FNQ, there is a plaque overlooking the ocean, quoting Captain James Cook in 1770: ***"They may appear to some to be the most wretched people upon Earth, but in reality they are far happier than we***

Europeans, being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous but the necessary Conveniences so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them. They live in a Tranquillity which is not disturbed by the inequality of Condition: The Earth and sea of their own accord furnishes them with all things necessary for life. They covet not Magnificent houses, household stuff etc; they live in a warm and fine Climate and enjoy a very wholesome air... They think themselves provided with all the necessarys of Life and that they have no superfluities”!

Furthermore, a chap named (Father) Robert Greenup states: *“Part of the enduring tragedy for modern Australia is that when European Christians eventually began to occupy this country, they had neither the eyes to see nor the ears to hear the richness of what they were encountering. The people who lived the ancient spirituality of this land found no welcome in the material culture that overtook them. There was no welcome either for the prophets and the holy men of the Dreaming and so much of what could have enriched our Christian spirituality was ignored. But hope still prevails. We are an Easter people and today we stand ready to take up the cross of lost opportunity. Today, as a Christian people, we stand ready to work together towards a genuine reconciliation and a truly inclusive Australian church.”* Surely, this is connected to Christian discipleship and inclusion of all.

In conclusion, for this occasion, I have a short story encapsulating a bit of history and acknowledgement of the bigger picture than just settlement and so called success since 26th January 1788, titled *“Sorry, Sorry”* (by Anne Kerr).

“I am, you are, We are Australian” (by Seeker Bruce Woodley) is a great song reflecting togetherness in diversity, as befits the Christian call to all to discipleship on our individual journeys, but together too! (*“We are one, but we are many. And from all the lands on earth we come. We’ll share a dream and sing with one voice: I am, you are, We are Australian.”*), as we also acknowledge Chinese New Year of the Rat in 2020!!

john hannon AUSTRALIA/SORRY/SURVIVAL DAY 26th January 2020

(I was surprised to discover, on reading “Fatal Shore” by Robert Hughes, that many of the First Fleet settlers (5% mortality rate before arrival in January 1788) nearly starved to death, waiting for the provisions coming with the Second Fleet nearly 2 years later (which had a 40% mortality rate before arrival!!). Rather than learning from the locals how to survive on what was available on land and in the sea, they ignorantly waited and waited and looked to the sky and ‘Mother England’, rather than around them!! Communication was understandably a problem, but at least they could have tried harder than just base judgements on initial impressions and prejudices).