

Jeff's reflection – Feb 28

On this second Sunday of Lent, our scripture reading takes us to a difficult place and a difficult teaching.

We are in the Gospel of Mark. It is perhaps the earliest of the four gospels in the Bible. It is the shortest of the four gospels. The books in the Bible are divided into chapters. In Mark's gospel there are only 16 chapters. Today's reading is found in the middle of those 16 chapters, in the centre of what Mark calls the good news about Jesus the Christ.

At the centre of this Gospel, Jesus asks his disciples, "Who do you say that I am?"

Peter replies that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, the Anointed One – in other words, Jesus is the one God has chosen to change the world, to Fix the world, to bring in the happy ending, the happy beginning, to make all the bad stuff go away and to bring in peace on earth and goodwill amongst everyone.

If that was all that occurred in the centre of Mark's gospel it would be a 'feel-good-half-way-through-the-gospel' moment.

But that is not all that we receive at the centre of this gospel. Jesus then elaborates on what it means to be God's anointed one.

In Mark's Gospel, Jesus often refers to himself as 'the son of man' – a description from the book of Daniel of God's anointed earthly ruler. Jesus says that he, the Son of Man, God's Anointed One, must undergo great suffering, be rejected by all the religious leaders who interpret God's intentions, and must suffer...and be killed!

The disciples may have been so emotionally numbed that Jesus' next words hardly registered – be killed...and after three days rise again!...whatever that might mean!

Peter argues, strongly declares that THIS CANNOT HAPPEN! – not to God's chosen one, not to the one who is supposed to fix the world!

But apparently God does things differently, for then Jesus gives a chilling clarification: "Anyone who wants to be my follower will have to deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me."

In that world, taking up your cross meant only one thing – you will be arrested, convicted, tortured, then carry through the streets the heavy wooden cross on which you would be executed!

At the centre of this good news of Jesus the Christ story that Mark tells, Jesus says that anyone who follows him must be prepared to be killed.

We'll see that play out during Holy Week and Good Friday.

It's a difficult scripture to listen to...it also seems irrelevant to our own practice of. Throughout history, and continuing today, there have been many who have been

arrested, tortured and killed because of their Christian faith; but most of us are reading or listening to this reflection on a computer or laptop screen in the relative comfort of our own home with no fear of being arrested because of our faith.

So how can these words of Jesus have any relevance to us?

Perhaps because we would rather that Peter was right – that God would just fix everything and we wouldn't have to deal with anything that looks like suffering or loss or death.

Jesus goes on to say that anyone who wants to save their life must lose it. Like Peter, maybe we need to lose something, lose a desire to ultimately manage life, to insist that life turn out the way we want it to turn out, that all our expectations will be fulfilled, that life comes with guarantees and assurances; lose our belief that relationships will never be broken, resources will never diminish, health will spring eternal and we will only have happy endings. We are all for the 'rise again in three days' thing, but we'd rather get there without any of the struggle or dying that precedes it.

Perhaps the life we save is the life that is life in God; perhaps life is finding that presence of God we refer to as the image of God within us; finding a place not of safety from suffering, but of God present with us, sharing in our suffering; a place of awareness and trust that we are God's, that we are part of a creation that is ongoing, that we are defined not by standards of wealth or reward, but are defined as God's child, God's creation, as one who lives within the life of God; a place from which we still seek a world fixed of its pains and brokenness and violence, trusting that God's way of fixing the world may not look like our way; life is a way of being in which we know that even being nailed on a cross is not the end of life; God raises up, God cannot remain entombed. Perhaps the centre of life is being centred in the love of God.

Perhaps the life we save is the life that in some way is always a dance between dying and being born again, and always being God's.

In God, life saved is lost, life lost is saved, and in the centre of the good news of Jesus the Christ, is God, with us, now and always. AMEN

For Reflection:

What would you say is the good news (gospel) of Jesus the Christ?

Have you experience God in times of struggle or suffering?

What do you think of the statement that life "is always a dance between dying and being born again"?