

Eighteenth Sunday After Pentecost
23 September 2018

Mark 9.30-37

At Campfire in the Heart near Alice Springs, where I was staying last week they have a campfire every Wednesday night where people, locals, tourists, and pilgrims alike, come and gather around the flames, share a meal, listen to a reflection, then go around the circle, each sharing a response to the reflection. It can be very powerful and build community in a disparate group of people. Last Wednesday a group of Aboriginal people turned up. The people in our group didn't know how to respond. "What is culturally appropriate?" they asked themselves. Some kept their distance and wondered. Some introduced themselves, others of us brought food and cups of tea. The four women were from a small settlement about 110km from Alice, and are part of the Aboriginal Women's Choir. Before they left, they offered to sing for us. They sang two hymns that they had learnt when they were on the mission at Hermansburg many many many years ago, hymns that they took back to Hermansburg in Germany several years ago, hymns that had been lost to the German people, returned. It was a beautiful and humble offering. We were blessed.

Being in the centre of Australia on retreat brings me face-to-face with myself, my love, my vulnerabilities and my brokenness. This week I have had to apologise for unclear communication. I have found myself comparing myself with others and finding myself lacking... as well as experiencing love and affirmation..

Jesus speaks again to his disciples about suffering: living, dying, rising. The stuff of human life. Stuff which is at the heart of God because to love means that we will suffer... and with Jesus it went even further.. But they don't get it, again! Mark's gospel is very tough on the disciples, but very truthful. They don't get it. How could they? When their God had always been known as all powerful, all knowing. Now, their teacher cuts to the quick and speaks of his death. We never want to hear such stuff. But they didn't ask him any questions. They didn't seem to try to understand. Why not? Perhaps it was too much.

Instead they carry on a conversation about who is the greatest. "I am better than you", one upmanship. They're embarrassed to share

that with him too. As I said earlier, I noticed myself comparing myself to others this week. "I don't have as much energy, I don't have as much wisdom, I am not like her. I'm not like him". I had to face my demons, to come back to knowing that I am loved for who I am, and I don't have to be anything else.

The disciples had to learn some difficult lessons. They had to learn that greatness is shown in service, that greatness is shown in how much we love one another, especially those who are on the edge, those who are vulnerable, those who are broken. We need to learn that too.

And we have to learn to love the parts of ourselves that are tender, vulnerable and broken. That is not what the dominant culture wants to hear. They do not want to be asked to stand alongside the poor, to love the poor within ourselves, the poor that surround us.

Jesus takes a little child and places her in the centre. When we love her, when we care for that little one, we are loving and caring for God.

On our retreat we heard stories of the most vulnerable, people who have been abused, people who have been shunned in their work for justice. We danced with them. We listened deeply to them, we heard their pain, and held them, and in that, we held God.

(Some things that I take away from the retreat, are my desire for silence, to be open and to let the mud settle in myself so that I can hear the voice of God within and around. That I can be grounded enough to let the pain and the passion of the world be released through me. I came away with a profound sense of being held and loved by the earth beneath my feet. Grounded.

I also came away with visions for this Cathedral community to thrive, to flourish, to be a force for change in our town. It is not big stuff, it is simple faithfulness, building on the footsteps of our forebears, our ancestors this place and it involves connecting with the aboriginal people of this place, and caring for the land and the peoples of this land, expressed in compassion, generosity and creativity. This involves deep prayer and meditation. This involves listening, listening to those we meet each day. This involves saying

sorry and reaching out our hands in humility, for we are part of an institution that has hurt so many. We have no power now, except the power of openness and love and compassion.)

‘Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent me’

So, God bless you. God bless the little you, the vulnerable you, the hidden, grumpy, fragile, raging, angry, tearful, depressed, beautiful you, and the big, strong, passionate you. God bless all of who you are and walk alongside you on your journey.

In our book group recently we reflected in the beatitudes. This poem emerged:

Blessed

Blessed are the ones who are tiny and soft and insubstantial

Blessed is my tired self which needs to curl up

Blessed is the jangly cranky overwhelmed self that craves silence

Blessed is the gentle creative spirit who yearns to be true

Blessed is my tired self which needs to curl up

Blessed is she who stamps her feet and cries out from the rooftop

Blessed is the gentle creative spirit who yearns to be free

Blessed is the one who is fearful of rejection

Blessed is she who stamps her feet and cries out from the rooftop

Blessed is the jangly cranky overwhelmed self that craves silence

Blessed is the one who is fearful of rejection

Blessed are the ones who are tiny and soft and insubstantial

Play the Aboriginal Women singing

Susanna

