

Sunday 14 October, Mark 10.17-31

This past week has been mental health week, and for a few days I have been at Pallotti College in the Yarra Valley for clergy retreat. It was certainly a great salve for my mental health, being surrounded by such beauty, – a large dark brown wombat wandered across the tracks in the early morning. At first, I thought it might have been a wild pig, but decided it must've been a wombat. Then, a little later, a small chocolate wallaby disappeared into the bushes. Of course there were many birds: kookaburras, parrots, cockatoos, wrens, and many different honeyeaters. There were cows too. But the early-morning visitors, wombat and wallaby, and the myriad of flowers filled me with awe.

My life, and mental health is not always so vibrant and nurtured. Sometimes, as you will probably have noticed, I allow myself to get rundown, then I get cranky and occasionally autocratic, not healthy for this community.

I recognise Job's anguish 'Where are you, God?' "I can't feel you near", and feel that too sometimes, and even on retreat, my spirit often descends to the depths... when I stop long enough, sometimes it is very dark before the dawn. Job has had a terrible time. He has lost everything – no wonder he cries out. I love his honesty.

Some times are pretty tough. Sometimes ageing is not for the faint hearted, sometimes relationships breakdown, health, jobs... And we wonder, "Where are you God?" Or even with the psalmist in psalm 22 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' We call out, rage even.

I remember when my mum got bowel cancer when I was in my early thirties, I was so cross with God, even though I didn't think it was God's fault, I let God have it, all my anger and pain. And God received it, and still loved me and was beside me.

Saint Augustine apparently said "our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you, God." That maybe true. I reckon the young man in the Gospel reading might have been a bit like that, restless, searching, looking for answers, wanting something more. He came to the right person with his questions. Not sure if it's the right

question, but he came anyway. And 'Jesus, looking at him, loved him.' I love that bit. Jesus loved him. Jesus didn't really care about the question or the answer. He loved him, and could see deeper than all that. He loved him, so he challenged him to go deeper, to experience freedom, to know his love.

He says, "let go of the stuff that gets in the way of relationship - In your case, give up your stuff – it's piled up so high, you've built a wall between you and others... Let it go, let it go... It is compassion you lack, earnest young man, you can't see those in need, and that includes yourself. My arms are open to enfold you but your stuff gets in the way – let it go, share it, and you'll be okay, come here, let me give you a hug... But he was holding on too tight, he couldn't do it.

At this time he couldn't loosen up enough to allow himself to be loved, to be free, how sad is that.

'What must I do to inherit eternal life'? Eternal life is here, now, today. It is relationship with God, it is fullness of life, as I said last week, 'it is opening up to soul'.

What stops you from embracing fullness of life, eternal life, right now?

What is blossoming in your life? What supports fullness of life – what people, activities?

I was depressed, after I first moved to Adelaide in 1992, after my non-ordination due to the injunction from the New South Wales Supreme Court. What got in the way of eternal life, of healing and health?

I think it was not admitting my need, at first – in other words, my pride and arrogance and not asking for help, also, my isolation in a new place, a new job, media attention..

And what helped? Antidepressants, a psychiatrist who listened to me weekly, a small group, time, prayer, walking in the bush, exercise and massage. Many of the things that help me now. Following God's way takes courage, honesty, love and an open heart. It takes a willingness to repent, to turn again and again, to

admit to sin, that is, to what gets in the way of relationship, and to trust, to fall into God's hands and stay there. Let go.

This is all pretty tough when depression, anxiety, mental illness, ill-health get in the way, but it is possible still, when we allow others to pray for us, others to support us, when we become part of this frail, strong, broken, vulnerable community. Together we will get there. Together we are strong. Jesus says 'come to me all you are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest.' Come to God, who right now is looking for you.

In this icon, Jesus is carrying the lamb that he has been looking for. It's a wonderful image for this mental health week of the one who seeks us out, stands alongside, is there on the darkest nights..

Believe it or not, God cares..

I guess our role too, as individuals is to stand along side, God with skin on. Our role as a cathedral also, is to stand alongside, to stand alongside those who are most vulnerable, most in need, and to honour the vulnerability and neediness within ourselves.

~~~~I invite you to come and take a stone. Sit with it for awhile and ponder, what is it in your life that stands between you and freedom, between you and love, between you and God, between you and yourself?

If there are too many stones they stop the plant from growing. A stone blocks the path to the light. What stuff, physical, psychological, spiritual, gets in the way of your growth and relationship with God?

Then take a flower and notice, what is blossoming in your life, what you are thankful for? Notice who or what supports you? Where have you seen God this week?

Count your blessings.

Jesus looked at them and said, 'For mortals it is impossible, but not for God; **for God all things are possible.**'

*Susanna*

