



ST HELIERS CHURCH  
& COMMUNITY CENTRE

# + ◦ TAKEAWAY ◦ SUNDAY SERMON

## Sunday 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2023, Easter 3

*If you invoke as Father the one who judges impartially according to each person's work, live in fear during the time of your exile. You know that you were ransomed from the futile conduct inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without defect or blemish. He was destined before the foundation of the world but was revealed at the end of the ages for your sake. Through him you have come to trust in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your trust and hope are in God. Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual affection, love one another deeply from the heart. You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God. For "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord endures forever." 1 Peter 1:17-25*

*Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, "What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?" They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, "Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?" He asked them, "What things?" They replied, "The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "Oh, how foolish you are and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and*

*then enter into his glory?" Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures. Luke 24:13-27*

## **We will remember**

Most of us would agree, I think, that whatever else ANZAC Day may be about, it's about *remembering*. "Lest we forget" as the saying goes. Lest we forget the likes of Private Samuel Whiteley, who answered the call of his country to go to war. Lest we forget his bravery in the face of the horrors that he and his fellow soldiers faced on the battlefield. Lest we forget the huge waste of life, the dreams unfulfilled, the haunted memories, the mothers who never got to see their sons grow old.

Lest we forget. And so, we dutifully remember. It is good to remember, to mourn, to honour.

...it raises the question, though, of *how* we remember. *How* we retell the events of the past. *How* those memories shape us in the present and pave the way for our shared future together. There are, of course, different ways of remembering.

There's a Croatian theologian called Miroslav Volf, who was imprisoned by the Serbs in the Yugoslav war. As he worked through his own memories of war, imprisonment, and injustice as a Christian theologian, he came to the conclusion that it's not enough to simply remember. Rather, he talks about remembering *rightly* in a violent world.

For example, you can remember wrongdoing in such a way as to keep old wounds open. The remembering is itself a re-hashing of the hurt. You relive the memory, the past haunting the present. You can remember in a way that you are holding out for retribution, even vengeance for past wrongs committed, bearing resentment, anger, fear. This kind of remembering, he argues, is not particularly fruitful for anyone – victim included.

Often we remember in a way that we place our difficult memories within a larger narrative or framework – to try and make sense of them, to try and redeem them as it were. Without doubt, I think, ANZAC is one of those memories for us, isn't it? Immensely scarring events for our nation. And yet they became foundational memories for our national identity, often bound up with a narrative of coming-of-age as a nation, of sacrifice for a greater cause, of a shared struggle for freedom against the forces of evil.

It's a powerful, unifying narrative. One that runs deep in our nation's psyche. But if it has been incredibly unifying, we've also seen in recent times how that same narrative can be used to divide and fuel conflict.

I remember during the anti-mandate protests seeing signs that appealed to the ANZAC memory. *They fought for our freedom... the reasoning went, and now our freedom is being taken away. Therefore we need to fight to honour their memory. The ANZAC fight is our fight.*

Now wherever you personally sat on the COVID-mandates is beside the point. This isn't about demonising one group over the other.

What concerned me was how the ANZAC memory was so easily co-opted to justify a particular position – in a way that increased division, heightened what was at stake, and entrenched an "us vs. them" mentality.

All that to say that *how* we remember can make all the difference. The language we use. The stories we tell. The framework we use. Remembering can heighten conflict, perpetuate violence. And memories can be used to divide and justify violence against another group.

But if remembering can do all this, then – Miroslav Vold argues – remembering can also lead to healing, reconciliation, forgiveness, and to new possibilities for peace.

For him, the Easter narrative – the suffering, death, and resurrection of Christ – is a kind of organising narrative for our own memories, an overarching framework. The story of the empty grave helps us to remember *rightly* in a violent world.

Consider our gospel reading today, for example. Two disciples are on their way from Jerusalem to Emmaus shortly after Jesus' crucifixion. They knew the grave was empty, but they didn't yet know that Christ was alive. They were confused, bewildered, and fearful.

As the story goes, the risen Christ comes and walks with them unrecognised on their way and asks them what they're discussing. So they tell him. They recall the horrific, confusing and traumatising events of the last few days.

They *remember*. But *how* do they remember? Well, they remember from a place where violence is the final word. Where Christ, the anointed One of God, has been brutally slaughtered, silenced, by the powers that be. They remember with fear, anger, animosity.

But then something happens. Christ speaks into their fear and helps them to remember *differently*. He recalls the same events, but now opens the scriptures and offers them a different perspective.

He remembers from a place where the grave is empty. Where God's promises of life and peace have been fulfilled. Where the cycle of violence has been decisively broken. Where love and forgiveness is the final word. In short, he helps them to remember *rightly* and in so doing opens them up to a new future filled with hope and joy.

... so here's the question I've been mulling over this week. How do we remember ANZAC rightly? What difference does the resurrection of Jesus make to *how* we remember? To the significance we ascribe to these memories? To the overarching narratives we use? What difference does it make to remember through a resurrection lens?

I wonder what you'd say. I think in his prayer earlier, Bill offered us a good starting point. We prayed: "today we remember endless wars that never ended war, the promised peace that was never peaceful." What a line.

*Today we remember endless war that never ended war...*

In our reading from First Peter, there's a similar line: the author remembers "the futile ways inherited from our ancestors". We are inheritors of the ways of violence, he suggests. The endless war that never ended war. Certainly, the sentiment resonates with the ANZAC memory. We have been scarred by the tragedy of war. The earth beneath is soaked with the blood of countless millions. The poppies we wear attest to that. And into this memory, Peter insists, *these ways are futile*.

But for us who follow the risen Christ, he reasons, we have been ransomed from these futile ways by the blood of the cross. In the spilling of his blood, Christ has taken the debt of violence upon himself. Though innocent, he has paid it. He is the sacrifice to end all sacrifices. The endless cycle of indebted violence has been broken, peace has been won. We are freed.

For Peter, something happened on the cross that fundamentally changes the way we remember our past. For him to remember rightly, I think, is to remember through the peace of the cross that the ways of violence are over. That war that has no place in God's future. It means to remember with lament that war was ever necessary.

But it's not *only* to remember with lament. Peter doesn't leave us there. For him, we are not simply ransomed *from* futile ways. We are ransomed *for* something. Freed *for* something.

What are we freed for? For "loving one another deeply from our hearts".

For him, the freedom which Christ won, is not a freedom to do whatever we want. It is a freedom to love fully, freed from the wrongdoings of the past that lock us into a cycle of violence and revenge, us vs. them. We are born into a living hope, we heard last week. Hope for a world of lasting peace founded on mutual love in light of the victory of the cross.

Miroslav Volf reckons the cross opens up a new community of love. Why? Because on the cross, both victim *and* perpetrator are freed from the consequences of their past.

On the cross Christ is both the victim, who suffers and dies in solidarity with all victims, leading them into a future in which their woundedness no longer defines them; *and* Christ is also, in a sense, the perpetrator, who substitutes himself, taking on the punishment deserved for wrongdoers.

In that way, Christ is opening up a new future for both perpetrator *and* victim in which reconciliation and healing – even life together – becomes possible. On the cross, the past is redeemed.

And this is where the cross, I think, challenges us to broaden our ANZAC memory. Because in the future of Christ we are not only called to love our own *but also somehow called to try and love the other...* the one we fought against, the one who hurt us.

You may notice I broke with tradition today in not having the New Zealand flag in the church. I did so intentionally. Not in any way to disrespect or diminish the memory of our own who fell. But to say that as followers of Christ, we are called not *only* to remember our own, but to remember as well those we fought against. Those whose blood soaked the same earth as our ANZACs. Those who fell as victims of the futile ways of war which Christ is bringing to end. Those who Christ died for as well.

And so today we remember. Yes. But may our prayer be that we remember *rightly* that our pasts may be redeemed by the empty cross. Lest we forget. Amen.