

Homily for people and parishes...

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday, 7th April, Easter 2

Readings: Acts 4:32-37

Psalm 133

1John 1:1-2:1

John 20:19-31

The Department of Home Affairs has on its website an Australian Values Statement which has seven points that people on Permanent and Temporary Visas have to give assent to. The most poetic value is a 'fair go' for all - and in defining 'fair go' - mutual respect, tolerance, compassion for those in need, and equality of opportunity are affirmed.

I love the idealism of 'fair go' as an aspiration and think it's an important thing to aim for in many areas of society. However, it's not hard to recognise that we fall short of this ideal. I was reminded of this last week when my dog became very unwell. Tests and scans revealed an inflamed pancreas, blocked bile duct, and failing liver. Her situation declined to the degree that on Good Friday we had to make a decision about whether she be treated, or, be put down.

Twenty-four years ago we had a similar situation with another dog and just did not have the money necessary for treatment, so we said goodbye. However, at this stage of our lives we do have financial capacity and the little critter is making a good recovery!

So, in something as simple as animal care some people have a fairer go than others. Obviously, there are more significant inequalities for young people in education, adults in employment, or families seeking housing. In these, and other areas, I suggest that some people have a 'fairer go' than others.

The criteria about who gets a 'fair go' includes, but is not limited to: income, gender, ethnicity, level of education, and where you live...

This week's reading from Acts also has aspirational values for it says, *"Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned land or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the Apostles feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."*

This sounds like 'fair go' in First Century Palestine, but was this really what life was like for the early church? Did everyone get along; everyone share their money; and no one had need? It sounds like a form of Communism long before Marx and Engels wrote their Manifesto in 1848! The letters of Paul were written before the Book of Acts, and they

suggest a more complex and believable reality. For example, the wealthy and gifted church in Corinth was a conflicted community which struggled with egos and spiritual pride and were clearly not of 'one heart and soul'!

But there are values articulated in the Acts reading that are aspirational for any community of Christian faith. Imagine being part of a church in which people shared what they had, and who they were; a church in which human needs were recognised, and compassionately responded to; and a church in which there was a God given unity of heart and mind.

John's Gospel this week describes a group of early believers who were frightened and uncertain. Without warning Jesus appeared and greeted them with a blessing. The writer says that he then breathed on them while saying "*Receive the Holy Spirit!*" – evoking the image given to the prophet Ezekiel where the breath of God gave life in a valley of what had previously been dry bones. Yet, despite that encounter with Jesus and that empowering of the Spirit, the disciples were still locked away in the house one week later. This time Thomas was with them, and he had previously not believed his companions.

For close to seven days Thomas had said – 'I don't believe you! It's not possible! It's not logical' Yet, into that lived experience of doubt and unbelief... Jesus came to Thomas.

It's reassuring to read and hear this because we are often like those first disciples – afraid and uncertain about the future; not really sure if resurrection life is possible. But, in the same way that Jesus went to those first disciples through locked doors, and empowered them with the Spirit, he comes to us, and he empowers us. Through whatever barriers we put in the way, he comes to us, and, as he said to those first disciples, he says to us, "*As the Father sent me, so I send you.*"

We meet with God in prayer at home, and in church, but when we leave these places how many of us remember that we are sent by Christ to live Christ-like lives? There is the challenge that our faith is not just something we 'do' in prayer, it is a way of being in the world.

When we read about the life of Jesus two of the consistent qualities that shaped his interactions with other people were compassion, and the desire for justice. He went to the least and the lost and the lonely of his society, and he spent time with them. He reassured them that God loved them just as much as God loved anybody else... and his own religion's authorities struggled to accept this.

Perhaps, the two Christ-like qualities of compassion and justice resonate with the Australian ideals of 'mate-ship' and 'fair go'. Is it too much to suggest that Jesus was a 'mate' to anybody, but particularly those who had need? Is it too much to suggest that he

wanted people to be given a 'fair go', particularly those in his society who had been written off? In this I think particularly of women, tax-collectors, sex workers, and lepers!

Jesus said to them, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."

So, who do we know is hurting or in need – and how might we respond to the person in a compassionate, Christ-like way? Who do we perceive our society has written off – and how might we respond to their lived reality, inspired by the Christ who gives our lives meaning?

Worth taking into prayer, I reckon... so, let me close with prayer now.

Holy God, we give thanks that you meet us in the midst of our lives, even when we have questions and wonder if you're real. In your grace, empower us with your Spirit and give us the courage to follow your leading to make a difference for good in a hurting world. We pray in the name of the One who has risen, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.