

Sermon Easter 3 Year B 2018

Many of you I am sure have been watching and following the Commonwealth Games of late. One of the most popular races toward the end of the competition – even if the Australians get disqualified in the heats – is the relay. In these weeks following Easter, the Church places before us those texts which in many ways are the stories of a relay, of the passing of a baton from one to another. Christ, in all the mystery of his risen splendour, passing on his ministry, his vision for humanity, his word of repentance and forgiveness, his hopes for the kingdom to his friends and followers. Human nature being what it is would otherwise have had the disciples say, *'oh no Jesus, you are doing such a good job, you better keep doing it. Oh no Jesus, I'll just mess it up. Oh yes Jesus, we see you were right all along, so you better just show us one more time to remind us.....'* But Jesus wants us to cooperate in his saving work, for us to grasp hold of what he has been carrying.

But as for the disciples so often for us as well – nervous, unsure, afraid, reluctant, scared to even take it into our grasp, in case we drop it. Confused and fearful the disciples have retreated behind closed doors. The new reality they are confronted with risks them becoming too overwhelmed becoming, then, insular, closed off from the world. All too hard. All too strange, scary, uncertain. Better just shut it all out... But Jesus can't be kept out. He comes into the midst of this situation to speak the word of peace. *Peace be with you.* Closed doors and fearful hearts can not keep him out or keep him away, and comes so close he says *'touch me'*.

And in the first test to see whether they would now take up the baton, a test so subtle they probably didn't even recognise it: *have you anything here to eat?* And in this, a remarkable *reversal* where he who for so long was the *host* is now the *guest*. In asking for hospitality Jesus not only offering assurances of his reality – yes I am real, I eat – but also, and perhaps more critically, seeing if this fearful band, when things are at their worst, could meet the *challenge* of hospitality. When the temptation was to remain frozen with fear, might they at last begin to take up the baton to share in Jesus' ministry of openness and acceptance, so often focused around the table?

And around the table, as so often in Jesus ministry, Jesus shows what it is to be his disciple. It is around the table that the Gospel writer Luke highlights for us the two directions in which he hopes the Christian community might take up the baton, how we are to be *faithful* in our task of carrying Christ's baton. The two directions are modelled by Jesus himself here, and both directions are played out within the context of community.

The first, in Jesus taking the piece of grilled fish, shows how the community is to be the place to *receive nourishment*. We cannot hope to live the life of faith in our own strength. We cannot hope to live a vital and life-giving faith if we depend on our own personal resources. We need each other. When things are tough, when we are faced with confusion, anxiety, fear, difficulty, hardship, the temptation can be to withdraw, to close up on oneself and shut oneself off from the world, to brave it alone. 'I don't want to be a bother. I don't want to be a burden...' But Christ shows that it is within the community that nourishment is shared and received, that within the community lies the hope of salvation. That is why even if we would really rather sleep in on a Sunday morning, read the bible alone at home, pray in the solitude of our own comfort, this is not enough to *sustain* let alone *give life*.

This, then points to the second direction that Christ in the upper room shows us. Having *received nourishment*, he then proceeds to *give nourishment*. Jesus breaks open the word and *shares* the nourishment of insight and truth. And of this the disciples are to be *witnesses*. We don't take our nourishment for ourselves, for our own benefit alone. This is the definite moment of passing the baton when Christ's responsibility becomes our responsibility. Whereas once the arena of God's saving activity was confined to a small back water under Roman occupation, now opens up to the furthest reaches of the earth. Jesus passes on the baton of his ministry to his disciples, to us, so that the Good News is to be proclaimed to all the nations, to all people. No one excluded. No one left out. As we continue to gather these weeks of Easter let us ever seek to draw to ourselves the nourishment that Christ gives us in his word and at his table within the community of faith; and to bring the life we have received into a world still so often hungry for truth and meaning. Amen.