

1st April 2018

Non-compliance

Reading one of my regular blogs this week I found this quote from Alison Harrington:

“Our faith calls us into a position of non-compliance... Our resistance is an act of supreme faithfulness to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.”

The Easter story is a chilling reminder of where non-compliance can lead us. Yet that is the life to which Jesus called us when he said: “Come, follow me,” as he set his face towards Jerusalem, knowing the probability of what awaited him there.

We should not confine our Easter thoughts merely to the events of these few days, as if that is what his life was about. Rather we should understand that the events of these few days were the outcome of having committed himself so completely to the work of the kingdom of God. Only when we properly comprehend the depth of his passion throughout his life for God’s will and love for this world, are we in a position to truly grasp the significance of both his death and God’s resounding ‘Yes!’ to his life in the resurrection.

It’s not true that he came to die. He came to live ... the most completely human life imaginable. His death was but a consequence of the way he lived ... a life that was marked by non-compliance to false authority and destructive powers.

I wonder if we have the same passion to demand our government not further cut our overseas aid budget to some of the poorest nations of the world so that it can provide tax cuts to the wealthy end of Australia’s relatively wealthy society?



8th April 2018

Team work

I love watching people work. I mean, I love watching how people work out their respective roles and contributions to achieving the tasks that require a team. And so on Friday morning I watched for a while the workmen prepare the boxing for the concreting. I noticed that it was what looked to me to be little more than a boy who was operating the back hoe while the two older men did the manual work around him. I commented to them about how it was the youngest of the team who got to have the fun on the digger. They quickly told me he was the one who had the skill to use it.

That was a great testament to the wisdom of that team. The comment was not offered with resentment. It was a matter of fact. He was the best person on that job so he did that job. Obviously the others brought different skills to the task which became apparent, and were respected, as they progressed through their work.

They provided a good model of the biblical image of the church being a body, and each member having different roles to play. Each part of the body/team/community brings particular skills to the mission of God. They should be respected and cherished for the roles they bring, without rancour, and without pomposity. No gift/member is more important than another. There will be times when certain members step forward and contribute their particular gifts, and times when they need to allow other differently gifted people to make their contributions unimpeded. We need to know how to recognise and encourage those with different gifts to exercise them to their fullest in the service of God.



The only ‘boss’ in the church is Jesus, the head of the body. There is no such thing as ownership of roles or spaces beyond a shared commitment to serving the kingdom of God. Learning to work harmoniously together as a multi-skilled team like I observed that team work together this morning, is a joyous thing to behold.

15th April 2018

Partnering with God

A short comment this week ... but a very important one.

"... It is not the task of Christianity to provide easy answers to every question, but to make us progressively aware of a mystery. God is not so much the object of our knowledge as the cause of our wonder" Kallistos Ware.

This is something Christians seem to turn back-to-front all too often in our desire for concrete answers. Far too often we turn God into an ATM for our convenience, asking God to help us out with this, or with that, when life gets a little inconvenient. Various people this week have shared stories with me of how God has been there when they needed help. They have asked God for help in a moment of difficulty at work, or when they have been looking for a parking space in the busy shopping centre. They have borne witness to how God has been there in those times.

It's great that they recognise that God is part of our everyday lives. But there is another side to this relationship, an equally important side to this equation. Are we as attentive to what God is calling us to partner with God in doing to help make the kingdom of God more present in the everyday lives of our neighbours, and the community?

We pray in the Lord's Prayer "Your kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven." That is more than fanciful wishful hoping. It is more than seeking another withdrawal from God's ATM of easy answers for our personal convenience. It is even more than adding our voices to the millions in our world who long for justice, peace, a safe country to call home, food to eat and clean water to drink. When we pray that prayer, we are offering ourselves to God to use us as part of God's answer to our own prayer.

God seeks relationship with us, not just to be at our beck and call when something is inconvenient for us. God is inviting us to become part of the much bigger and grander agenda of making the world a better place. We are invited to become part of something beyond ourselves. We are called outside of our finite selves, to be awed and inspired by the wonder that is God's divine will and purposes to be part of God's loving the whole world. As Good Friday reminds us, that can be costly, but as Easter Day reminds us, such participation in God's agendas will be met with God's resounding YES!

What greater joy can there be in life than to be caught up in the wonder and mystery of our awesome God?

22nd April 2018

Culture

The word 'culture' has popped up in many conversations I have been engaged in this week. So maybe that's a sign I should make a comment about 'culture'.

I'm not talking about *"the arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement"* as one definition defines it. I'm talking about the other definition: *"the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society"*. Of course, a biologist would tell you that a culture is the medium for growth. That idea of being a medium conducive to growth sits very comfortably with the concept of customs and social behaviour of the church.

In so many ways our 'culture' is what defines us. We all live in groups and, deny it as we might try, our groups have characteristics. As a church we are called to live out a culture that is inspired by Jesus. When people look at the culture of our church, they see how we understand the mission to which God invites us to be participants in. I hope that when the Sunbury community looks at St. Andrew's Church, they see a community whose lives exemplify the continuing ministry of Jesus Christ. There is a song that goes: "and they'll know that we are Christians by our love." So we might expect that when the Sunbury community looks at St. Andrew's Church, they will recognise a unique brand of love that commends itself to others.

One of the dimensions of our culture is being the best citizens we can be in this community, so we are not content to employ dubious practices we might see parts of the business world indulge in. Some of those dubious practices have become expected. We can't accept those standards. We must be more inclined to go above and

beyond what is asked, or expected, and show ourselves to be trustworthy and good to deal with. That is part of living out Christian love, because we care about the people and businesses with which we necessarily deal.

The idea of culture extends from our high level vision of the kind of church we want to be (set in such conversations as in our *Dreaming Day* next weekend), right on down through all our interactions as leaders and members of the church with other people (both how we talk to one another in meetings, and how we talk and deal with people outside the church).

Culture is something we need to actively attend to constantly to keep it alive and stimulating growth.



29th April 2018

Vision and purpose

There is often a sneaky thought in the back of our minds when we approach an event like our Dreaming Day that questions why we would bother. The answer to that is simply that without a purpose we shrivel up and die. There is a famous dictum in mission planning circles: “Without a vision the people perish.”

Doing some reading on this idea I came across a psychologist who said simply: “Without purpose, what’s the point of getting up every day?” He wrote “It’s important to have a purpose. I have seen lives filled with loneliness and despair when no specific purpose has been embraced. On the other hand, I have seen drastic improvements in psychological well-being when people have identified a meaningful purpose.” (Brad Klontz Psy.D., CFP, in an article *Living on Purpose: Don’t waste any more time stumbling through life.*)

My hope from Sunday’s reflections and conversations, and consequent processing of our contributions, is that we at St. Andrew’s will grasp a concerted purpose for our life, such that we discover passion and energy and focus that will be stimulating and invigorating.

Klontz wrote a little later “I believe that we are each on earth for a special purpose, which is up to us to name.” We are seeking to name the particular purpose of St. Andrew’s Uniting Church in the mission of God’s broader church here in Sunbury and beyond. What do you understand our purpose to be? Is God stirring a passion in you that our church needs to scratch? That purpose is the point of our existence. That’s why it is so important that we identify it, that we can name it, and claim it, and have it inspire every one of us who is part of this church.

There is profound psychological value in us being able to name and claim our purpose, for it sets the entire context of our lives – as opposed to us being just a haphazard combination of goals and non-goals, and actions and non-actions, meandering through time and space. God created us for a purpose. And that purpose is the master plan for our life, expressing itself each day in our world, our play, and our relationships.

