

6th May 2018

Mark Thompson

Some news in the media during the week left me very saddened. I could be talking about the continuing news coming out of the Royal Commission investigating our banking and financial advice sector. In fact I was more angered by that news than saddened, particularly as I heard news of the failures of the bank we bank with. They have failed us terribly, driven by greed and a patent disrespect for ethical practice. And the supposed regulators have let us down badly. It is providing ample warning for those with eyes to see, of the dangers of diminishing a strong and independent regulatory authority. So much cause for apology, but nothing that means diddly squat. So that wasn't what saddened me this week. That angered me.

What has left me very sad this week is reading of the trouble that Mark 'Bomber' Thomson is now in. One of the greatest captains the game has known. Captain of two premierships teams. Coach of two premierships teams. Never the greatest player in his side but affirmed as one of the most focused, inspiring and innovative people the game has produced. Those who played with him, and under him, speak of him with the highest praise, but he found himself out of the game and honestly admitting he was lost.

Now he finds himself charged with serious criminal offences and confronted by journalists as he left his home during the week, there was no squirming sidestepping or obfuscation. He apologised to his fans and those who have cared about him. He accepts that he has let many people down. And in that honesty I felt an enormous weight of sadness, and pity ... even a measure of forgiveness. In that honesty and confession, I felt a measure of hope for his future.



There are lessons for us in these contrasting stories.

13th May 2018

Christianity is a lifestyle

Maybe we need to give some thought to what we understand the Christian faith to be about. A prominent writer of recent times, Richard Rohr, comments:

"Christianity is a lifestyle - a way of being in the world that is simple, non-violent, shared, and loving. However, we made it into an established 'religion' (and all that goes with that) and avoided the lifestyle change itself. One could be warlike, greedy, racist, selfish, and vain in most of Christian history, and still believe that Jesus is one's 'personal Lord and Saviour' ... The world has no time for such silliness anymore. The suffering on Earth is too great."

On the same day I read a sermon that my colleague, Rev. Dr. Geoff Thomson from Pilgrim College, preached at Queens College Chapel last Sunday night that he titled, *"What Cory Bernardi and Tony Abbott get so wrong about the 'Judeo-Christian tradition'."* It is an excellent analysis of the blinkered, convenient political definition many people hold about what the tradition is that we are part of.



In that sermon Geoff said:

"I'm ... uneasy because I think the political use of Christianity prevents any serious or wider engagement with the purpose of Christianity – at least as those purposes have some grounding in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus."

He finished with this observation:

"Christian faith is not about preserving a culture. It is about engaging Jesus Christ and serving and shaping many cultures. And that is what we are all invited to do in this place and every place."

It is a matter of a lifestyle that is lived out in contradistinction from the prevailing values and priorities of the surrounding community. That is what I understand this Judaeo-Christian tradition is really about. We are called to live out a culture in our faith community by grounding our lives in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. That, and nothing less than that, can be expected to have a positive impact on the community around us.

20th May 2018

Domestic violence

A tragedy of unconscionable proportions happened in Western Australia this week. And my head and heart are spinning to hear the father of those children describe the man who police believe murdered them, along with his daughter and his wife, as a “good bloke” who “gave them (his wife and 4 children) to me and now he’s taken them away.”

We must be careful not to get into conjecture about what brought this tragedy about. It may, or may not, have been mental illness, or anything else. That is not for us to know yet. There will be inquiries that will make those assessments based on evidence, not conjecture from the other side of the continent. But we cannot let it be said that he was a ‘good bloke’ who did what he did to people ‘he was responsible for’. His responsibility to his wife, his daughter, his grandchildren, was to nurture life – not to take it away. He had no ‘right’, no ‘prerogative’, to do that ... whatever was going on.

This notion of a man’s ‘prerogative’ underlies so much domestic violence. As a church we must be absolutely clear that such prerogative does not exist. This has prevailed in parts of the church for far too long. Domestic violence is wrong ... is wrong ... is wrong ... no ifs or buts or justifications. It’s just wrong.

A man’s duty is to love and cherish those it is his privilege to live in relationship with, and his responsibility to do the best for. No part of loving and cherishing condones acts of violence.

The statistics tell us that at least one woman every week is killed by a partner or a former partner in Australia. *At least* one every week! One in three Australian women has experienced physical violence since the age of 15. One in five has experienced sexual abuse. One in four has experienced emotional abuse.

So we are not just talking only about people outside the church. We are talking about what happens in churches as well ... even in our own church. There is no theological justification for such behaviour. It is totally against Jesus’ teachings and is incompatible with God’s mission. Our responsibility as Christians, as a church, is to create safe, respectful and supportive environments so that women and men experiencing domestic violence feel safe to seek help.

If you are among that number and feel you need help, don’t hide it away. Come and seek support.

27th May 2018

Let us be known by our love

Something quite remarkable, and wonderful, happened at the royal wedding last weekend.

As one respondent described it:

An ardent campaigner for social justice, particularly on immigration and same-sex marriage, Chicago-born Curry, himself a descendent of slaves, did not tone down his passionate message of the social and political power of love in order to align with the reserve of his pale and stately onlookers. He did not filter. He did it black, with music in his arms, and rhythm in his voice, and a looseness and openness in his face that supposed an almost familial acquaintance with his audience.

It was a sermon that will go down in history as a moment when the enduring seat of colonialism was brought before the Lord, and questioned in its own house. In the mention of slavery was the inherent accusation of white silver-spoon complicity, and that this union should not go forth without acknowledging it.

“Love is the way,” Curry chanted. “When love is the way, we actually treat each other, well” – he put his hand on his hip and his elbow on the lectern – “like we are actually a family.”

[Diana Evans posted by The Guardian 21 May copyright 2018. More at <https://qoo.gl/dSW4Zm>]

Evans captured the wonder of the moment beautifully. But it begs a question. How often do we ‘filter’ our witness to the Gospel because of the context? How often do we deny what we claim to believe in the conversations in which we participate in our clubs and organisations and workplaces?

Bishop Curry showed the courage of the martyrs to own the essentials of the Gospel when he knew that many of those who would be present would be inheritors of vast wealth accumulated on the sweat and toil of slavery and exploitation. Even the challenge was offered with a generosity of spirit and love. Wouldn't Sunbury be an even greater place to live if that kind of love became the defining character ... and it should start with we Christians. As the old song puts it: "They'll know we are Christians by our love." Love is no sappy sanguine emotional sop. Love is not eroded by self-sensitivities. Love is stridently honest and invites people into reconciled relationships, sometimes at the cost of sacrifice.

LET US LOVE ONE ANOTHER FOR
LOVE COMES FROM GOD.

-1 JOHN 4: 7, 19



Let us be known by our love.
