

**6<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

## **Badges**

I do want to talk about what we see ... at least sometimes.

Today I gave my regular blood donation at the Blood Bank. It was a milestone donation, so I was presented with a badge. And I thought, wow. You see, I'm not particularly into badges ... or any kind of defining paraphernalia ... very much. It is not a badge that I will proudly wear around and expect people to pay homage to my courageous sacrifice of my blood. After all, one of the reasons I give blood is to lower my iron levels. That it is also doing other people good is a bonus.

Perhaps I should explain that I went to start donating 40 years ago. After they took the samples they inadvertently left me for a moment in the room by myself and I promptly fainted. I had that reaction to needles back then. I haven't done that for ages. But they immediately made it clear they didn't want me if I was going to faint on them. So even with my rare blood type I haven't donated until it was discovered that my iron levels were high, and the simplest way of dealing with that is to donate blood. So there is really nothing at all courageous about my donating blood.

While I have been a proud member of the Essendon Football Club for 15 years, and have the membership badge so inscribed to prove it, that is not a badge I wear around either ... except to the footy, of course, along with my scarf, and maybe my jacket if it looks like being wet or particularly cold. It's not because I'm not proud to be a Bomber supporter. It's just not what defines me.

But I sometimes wonder if we are not guilty of doing that with our badge that declares that we are members of God's family. Do we proudly put on our 'Christian' badge on Sunday morning as we head off to church, and then not wear it again for the remainder of the week because we don't want it to define us? That is the one badge I am prepared to wear all week, week in, week out, year upon year. It's one of the reasons I don't wear a clerical collar. Who I am is not primarily defined by me being a minister as me being a disciple of Jesus. I am above all else one who seeks to follow the example of Jesus and join God's action in the world.

But what should I do with my Blood Donor badge?

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**13<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

## **Many meanings**

Regularly I read something, or something happens, and I want to share it. And too often I also want to explain what it means to me, how I interpret it.

A colleague recently had a column published in *The Age* about our tendency to add our own interpretation to the stories we share. After all, people do want to explain what their personal story means. But, in this column, she was inviting us to confine ourselves to the story, and then leave space for interpretation on the basis that it offers enriched meaning.

She used the example of a storytelling workshop in which a volunteer offered to tell an astonishing story from his youth. As a teenager he had gone hiking with his parents who were skilled mountaineers but they made a major tactical error and had to descend a mountain in darkness. Both the boy's parents were badly injured, his mother could not walk. The father commanded the 15-year-old: "You need to carry your mother down to the car. There will be a lot of things you want to say to me about this. You cannot say any of them now. You can say them when we are at the car." And the boy had carried his mother all the way down.

That confronting experience had formed the beginning of his own faith journey. He wanted to include that outcome. He was asked to tell the story without the coming-to-faith addendum. Having been promised that if he woke up the next day believing he'd betrayed his integrity he could then share that outcome, he agreed to the experiment.

He told his boyhood story. The following day he came to the curator and said, "Thank you. I had only ever let it mean one thing. Now I have access to all these other meanings."

This echoes something I heard from a biblical scholar about the wrong-footed expectation that the Bible has to be read literally. "If you read it as a flat text with one meaning – the only response there is room for, is assent."

No conversation, no wondering, no dialogue. We rob ourselves of meaning when we approach sacred texts and personal stories having decided what they must mean. This shuts down our experience of the Divine in so many unexpected ways.

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**20<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

## **Taking care of Creation**

I'm sure we are all glad that the election campaign is over and that we at least know who will form the next government (as least I'm hoping we do by Sunday morning).

One of the prominent issues throughout this campaign has been climate change. This week I came across this comment from a scientist that seemed to nail the issue for me: *"I used to think that top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that thirty years of good science could address these problems. I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed and apathy, and to deal with these we need a cultural and spiritual transformation. And we scientists don't know how to do that."* (Gus Speth, US advisor on climate change).

There has been an overwhelming and unprecedented consensus in the scientific world. Among those scientists who submit their work for peer review, there is absolute agreement about what is happening in our climate and the potential consequences if we fail to address it now.

Irrespective of that consensus the issue has kept being kicked down the road by successive governments. It seems we are more fearful of incurring the cost of addressing it than we are of the costs of doing nothing. Meanwhile we experience more dramatic weather episodes – such as bush fires, storms, droughts, flooding, accelerating extinction of species critical to the biodiversity of our earth.



Our Bible opens by speaking of the honour God has given us to steward the delicate, fragile interconnectedness of the created order. Our Bible constantly speaks to us about living in harmony with the whole of creation – with other people, between groups of people, but also with the natural world upon which our life on this planet is dependent. The couple of times Jesus spoke about heaven, he wasn't talking about some place we go when we die. He was talking very much about how we live in this life. And at the close of the Bible we read that God will renew the face of the earth, creating a new earth and a new heaven, not out of nothing as at the beginning of time, but out of the existing earth and heaven. God is about renewing the face of the earth, declaring his people to be agents of reconciliation.

As that scientist truly recognises, the scientists can't do that work. Only we can do that. It is a moral problem. I think it was Kevin Rudd who declared that climate change was the greatest moral problem of our time. The scientists are doing their job. But we must both listen and then act. It is a moral issue. As such, we Christians have an important role to play in helping our community overcome its penchant for selfishness and apathy and to become actively engaged with this issue.

So let's play our part by doing the little things we can personally do, and supporting the initiatives of our authorities who are prepared to engage the issue. It's our Christian responsibility.

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**27<sup>th</sup> May 2019**

## **God bless Australia?**

Perhaps I should be used to God's name being taken in vain, while yet others claim God's name in support of spurious agendas that I can find no basis for in my reading of the stories of Jesus. For this reason I cringed when Scott Morrison concluded his victory speech with "God bless Australia".

My initial reaction was to be aghast at this mimicking of America's penchant for the assumption that God is always on its side. Do we also fall into the trap of assuming that God is on our side. What if we are wrong. A bit of humility wouldn't go astray before making such pronouncements.

That being as it may, maybe it might prompt us to reflect on what a 'blessed' Australia might look like. Perhaps this a great opportunity for Christians to go back to the most fundamental teaching of Jesus on the theme of blessing: the Beatitudes. You know the ones.

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.

Blessed are the merciful, for they will receive mercy.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.



If a divinely-blessed Australia sees the poor lifted up, if Australia's indigenous people can be comforted in their mourning, if the meek community volunteers who seek no gain or status in their public service can be upheld, if the prophets who call out greed and idolatry are given a hearing, if those who practice mercy can change our attitudes to refugees, if those working for peace and reconciliation between communities and within families can be honoured and not mocked ... then, yes, indeed, 'God bless Australia'. Then perhaps Australia would be a very different and better place.

Happy pondering.

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