

4th November 2018

Radical love

As I was pondering this week's Gospel reading about the priority of loving God AND loving our neighbour as we love ourselves, I came across two short quotes that opened up a profitable, if challenging, line of thought.

The first was something Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn wrote:

"If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?"

Insightful as ever, he refused to locate the lack of love outside ourselves. Instead he acknowledges the struggle we all engage in being faithful disciples of Jesus ... or loving as Jesus calls us to love.

Then I read these comments that are good examples of the way we compromise Jesus' call to love the poor and the hungry and the marginalised. Jesus couldn't have been clearer:

"Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." (Matthew 25:45)

Yet so often we turn this injunction into the kind of conditional commands like James Martin S.J. posits:

*"Feed the hungry only if they have papers."
"Clothe the naked only if they are from your country."
"Welcome the stranger only if there's zero risk."
"Help the poor only if it's convenient."
"Love your neighbours only if they look like you."*



That, indeed, is not what Jesus said. Nor do I believe it was what Jesus intended. We are called to radical love. Radical love is the way of radical discipleship. The question for us is how might we give expression to this radical love to our neighbours in Sunbury and beyond?

11th November 2018

Learning from each other

Last Sunday night I learned a lesson. I learned how to break down a chicken carcass properly. I learned how to make Chicken Kiev. I learned how to make chicken mignons. And I learned how to prepare a fully boneless a chicken to be made into a rolled roast.

But those skills are not the learning I am talking about. Sue wanted to participate in a cooking school that her sister was going to in Cohuna. She wasn't prepared to go if I wasn't prepared to go with her, given that her sister's husband was away on work assignment. She didn't want to leave me on my lonesome. Wasn't that sweet! It wasn't something I might have chosen to do for myself. But, that said, I thoroughly enjoyed myself and, more importantly, I learned some new skills which I would not have learned if I had not listened to what was important for her and foregone what else I might have done in that time ... skills which might even get shared with other people over our dinner table.

Reflecting on that during the week, it occurred to me that this is a useful metaphor for how we best live as a church community. It's not about what I want, or what any other individual wants. No one individual is the repository of all the best ideas, or all the wisdom, and no one individual should ever presume to determine what the church community should (or should not) do. And no individual, with their particular skills and perspectives, is dispensable without the body being less capable. Rather we are at our best when we function as a vibrant organism of many parts, always making space for the contributions of others, while being prepared to make our own particular contributions.

Our life is about learning from one another so that we might be a more effective manifestation of the Kingdom of God in the places of our work, leisure and pleasure. To learn from one another requires engagement in contexts of intentional dialogue and reflection. We have been given to each other to be the Body of Christ.

18th November 2018

Onions are dangerous!

You might have noticed this week an item of ground-breaking news of national significance. The iconic Bunnings sausage sizzle has been snagged by red tape overkill. As the account I read put it:

Like safety warnings on peanut packets advising they may contain traces of nuts, or hot content cautions on coffee cups, modern society's overly cautious nature has the humble warehouse chain's iconic fundraiser in its sights.

A new occupational health and safety requirement has shaken up how the quintessentially Australian delicacy of a barbecued sausage in bread is to be constructed. Specifically, the new rule — which will apply to all stores nationally — tackles the apparent dangers posed by a few bits of fried onion... grabbing a sausage on the way in or out is an unmissable part of a trip to one of the mega warehouses. It's a tradition that has become as Aussie as thongs, meat pies and hating celebrities who achieve fame overseas. And recently, shoppers might have noticed that the fried onion can no longer be placed on top of the sausage. It's now on the bottom.

That's right. The onion must now be on the bottom, held in place by the snag. Who would have thought something as innocuous as a few pieces of fried onion could be so threatening! I'm wondering how the sausages will be served at the Giant Car Boot Sale!

Well, of course, we do know. Jesus talked about Christians being like salt and yeast ... imperceptible commodities whose presence in the surrounding material renders enormous effect. So perhaps we have a new metaphor for the effect our presence in the community should have — fried onion on top of the sausage instead of being oppressed by the sausage that seeks to keep it in its place.

God bless the revolution! (as a friend of mine is inclined to end his grace before meals).

25th November 2018

Learning from each other

This Sunday marks the end of the Church's year. Next Sunday we start again on our Advent journey through the Christ event and on throughout Jesus' life.

I'm also very conscious that most of us are about to embark on a frenetic and exhausting marathon. I hope we have been in training! What with a plethora of parties, end-of-year gatherings, getting the Chrissy decorations up, carol nights, buying of presents and preparing special meals for family gatherings. No wonder we arrive at the doorstep of Christmas itself feeling frazzled and utterly unready for the real thing.

It's now that we need to take a few moments and make some resolutions about how we are going to mark Christmas this year. I encourage us all to pause and ponder how we might celebrate this Christmas season in a way that best gives expression to what we understand this Christmas story to be about. This meme might get us started.

