

**13 September 2020**  
**15th Sunday after Pentecost**

In today's Gospel Jesus returns to the core and heart of his good news: forgiveness and reconciliation. It is probably at the centre of much angst and differences between Christians and the secular world where the sinner is to be restored and redeemed and not to live life as an outcast and despised. Of course forgiveness requires true repentance and justice.

All of us in Australia, as in many other parts of the global community live in a world of high speed, high octane, non-stop, credit fuelled, technology driven and shaped, market driven, big projects, multi-cultural societies, including the mass movement of 60 million across borders each year. While the changes in the world that we have experienced could have never been envisaged by the majority of us, rapid change continues. Our model of church and mission however has struggled to keep pace and remains in many ways feudal, pastoral, clerical, and divided over many issues including belief, ethics and social norms. Many of the issues that divide us also divide the community. Do we see this post-modern world as portrayed in the matrix films as mindless, Godless, Zombie like, believing all the media tells them and who mindlessly respond to any stimulation, or a world where science and technology, as revelation of divine love can bring opportunities for peace and harmony across the creation to bring to fruit the Kingdom of God? Where do we place the church in all this? What may a future church look like?

In our passage today from the book of Exodus, and according to the Passovers tradition, the youngest son, at each Passover celebration, asks his father why this night is different. He is instructed that this Passover night "is a reminder as if he and his family have just come out of Egypt from bondage to freedom, from sorrow to gladness, from mourning to festival, from darkness into light, from servitude to redemption." What is described is a family meal, a sacred meal, that does not need priest or altar. This reading becomes central for understanding Matthew's Gospel as he seeks to establish a new way for his emerging congregation, journeying from Judaism to faith in Christ. Matthew and his understanding of Jesus is concerned with defining and giving meaning to what it means to be community and how we are to relate to one another. Community is a word that has a variety of meanings in our contemporary society.

Margaret Thatcher once claimed there was no such thing as community only society and the individual, a philosophy embraced by neo liberalism and free market economics.

Let me share a few thoughts about community from my own experience as a child and young person and more recently writing about the challenges of community life today.

As a family I lived in a street where everyone knew each other, and we shared the ups and downs of everyday life together. Fellowship was enjoyed each Sunday morning in what my father called the catholic hour between 11am and 12noon, when the men of the street, few who went to church shared a quiet ale as we say and chatted, while the women prepared lunch, often the Sunday roast. I recall my mother for many years looking after a neighbours' children after school each day, following his wife leaving him. The men of the street fixed things together while the women shared child minding responsibilities. There was much community caring and sharing.

Hans Kung noted theologian in many of his writings speaks about the macro Framework that underpins much of the changes that have affected Community life and the challenges it brings

over the past 50-60 years. He was writing before the advent of social media and the emerging influence of technology that affects our understanding of community today. Kung speaks about

1. The declining influence of Europe on our way of life
2. The changing political landscape and the decline of socialism, imperialism and the challenges facing capitalism brought home to us by the recent GFC and our current pandemic
3. The decline in church attendance and the recognition of the divine in the lives of people taking various forms.
4. The decline of the Industrial state and now the rise of the new technology. We have a new revolution on our hands that many of us do not understand or even comprehend its impacts. A good example is the growing urbanisation of the planet and the decline in rural communities. Another example is the changing nature of work. Gender roles and family formation is also going under rapid change influencing community life and the individual

Many people today seek a return to the past ignoring the fact of World wars, lack of antibiotics and the many benefits like the washing and dishwashing machines and motor car to name a few.

Equally if not more of us, if the current responses to the pandemic is any indication, have expressed the desire and hope that we will rediscover the importance of love, shared care, and family as the essentials of living in community and in harmony with the fullness of the created order.

For me the Exodus story has much to say to us at this time. As the Church and many in our community feel at a loss, in the wilderness unsure where or what may be next. Today's readings call us to discernment and action if we are to arrive at the promised land for our times. This will involve challenging and difficult conversations. It may even involve pain and suffering as the Israelites experienced before they were liberated from dominance and slavery, Matthew's Gospel challenges us to become involved in the community around us and to be engaged in conversations that will shape our life together. Matthew's Jesus provides us with a road map.

In an earlier account in Matthew's Gospel Jesus calls Peter to step out in faith into the rocky seas to move to the edge of the raft away from the safety of the centre. Likewise, he does to us. In today's Gospel we are given a model of respectful discussion and conversation. If there is trouble in our community let's name it, talk over coffee and come to some place where even if we differ, we remain in fellowship. All of this is important because it is the challenge of being in communion not only with God but also our brothers and sisters whatever their opinions and approach to faith and life. Yes, tough stuff as we say. It matters because of how Jesus concludes in today's Gospel passage and reflected in today's reading from Romans.

"Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven." How we choose to treat one another, converse, differ or exclude has consequences. We have the power and the responsibility to bind and to loose not only within the church but wider community by our actions and words.

Today's Gospel lesson is about how we are to live together in community not only in the life of the church but to build God's Kingdom that reflect the very nature of God.

The proclamation throughout the Gospels is that Jesus is the bearer of the Kingdom or community of God where the resources of the earth are respected and shared with justice.

The Biblical principle of covenant and the building of a common humanity based on love undergird the Christian approach to community, summed up in the two great commandments to love God and to love your neighbour. It embraces the belief and promise that God has a continuing interest in the creation and has a passionate desire to be in a relationship of love with the creation and for humanity to live in harmony with both God and others.

The church as community. What do we mean? How do we act? How does your church stack up?

- Faith in action
- Blessing to the world
- Incarnational
- Redemptive
- Participatory
- Reconciling
- Reflective

Like the story each Jewish family observes when they celebrate Passover, we as Christians do the same with the gathering at the Eucharist when we recall also the journey from wilderness, exile and freedom in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Whether it be High Mass in a great cathedral or the gathering of two or three around the holy table we are reminded of our responsibilities to live our lives with forgiveness and reconciliation at the centre of our own relationships. This is our calling to grow a community of inclusive love here at St George's and to show the broader community what it means to be Christian in the world of today.

Amen