

GOOD FRIDAY

4 years ago, on Good Friday, we featured a piece of sculpture by one of our former parishioners. John Ewing. John was an American who was part of the animation team that created one of my all-time favourite works of Art, Jungle Book.

The work of John we featured was this one.



This is the broken body of Jesus being taken down from the Cross. And like all great pieces of art, it can speak on many different levels.

I wonder what it evokes in you, today?

What struck many of us at the time, is that we see countless images of Jesus on the Cross – or just the cross alone.... but most of us had never seen an image like this, portraying the moments not long after Jesus would have spoken His final words... *“it is finished”*.

People gathered around the sculpture, it in a reverent silence, and you could palpably sense, that it was evoking different emotions in people. It was taking all of us, on a journey of response.

And this for me, is very much the power of Good Friday and the Cross.

If we let it, the events of Good Friday, have the capacity to stir in all of us, a profound journey of response. There’s something about the sheer raw nakedness of our human condition on display... the good, the bad, the beautiful, and the very ugly, that gives us some of the deepest revelations of our humanity.

And given the current extraordinary situation of our world, no matter how many times we’ve visited this Good Friday narrative, it still has the power, I believe, to speak in profound and different ways. **Because the story may never change, but we do.**

You don't need me to tell you, that a crisis will always bring out the best and the worst of our humanity. And in the current situation, we've all witnessed scenes that are not the best of who we can be.

But we've also examples of the human spirit, rising to the occasion, with inspiring acts of compassion and courage.

The 2 people taking the body of Jesus down from the Cross are **Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea**. And when you know the context of their positions in Jewish society, you can see that not only was this an act of great compassion on their part... it was also one of tremendous courage.

So when I asked myself the big question for this day...

How can this extraordinary story of the Cross, speak into our extraordinary times?

I kept coming back over and over, to this one human quality and virtue, of courage.

American Poet and civil rights activist Maya Angelou said this about the quality of courage.



Courage is the most important of all our human virtues, because without courage, you can't practice any other virtue consistently.

Dig deep on that one and you'll see the truth of it.

And we the truth of this it in all the central characters of the Good Friday story. They are all mirrors of our own human weakness and failures of courage.

Isn't Peter all our capacity for denial. All those times, when we speak the fine words, but when the situation gets a little dangerous - self-preservation tends to win out.

Isn't Judas all our betrayals. The times in life when betray the greater cause for our own gain. Or when we put the lure of money or materialism before relationships.

And what about Caiaphas, the Chief Priest, willing to sacrifice a principle or even a person (in this case Jesus) for the supposed greater good of an organisation or institution. How many times have we seen the sorry consequences of this?

Pilate is all of us, cynically washing our hands of a situation that's just getting to messy and complicated. Let's just play out the easy option of compromise. Keep the status quo ticking over.

And then we see the Roman soldiers. Not satisfied with carrying out the execution of an innocent man, they just need to spice it up with a bit of mocking and taunting of Jesus. The inner bully that lurks in us all.

And finally, the Crowd. One-minute they make Jesus their hero and saviour, and the next shout crucify. This is all our fickle spirit. Our capacity to find the scapegoat and desire blame. Every single day we can witness this on twitter and social media.

But when you dig deeper into these less than noble traits of our human condition, what do we see at the heart of it?

**What we see, is that when *fear* gets the better of our *courage* ...
we fail to do the right thing.**

AND THIS BRINGS ME BACK TO THE PERSON JESUS CHRIST...

You hear many words to describe Jesus, but it's not often that you hear people talk about the **courage of Jesus**. And yet for me, it's always been one of the standout qualities of His life and teachings.

At every single step, Jesus had the courage to live out the conviction of his own, commandments. No-one could ever accuse Jesus of failing to walk His own talk.

- He had the courage to touch those considered untouchable. To include the uninvited.
- The courage to never retaliate and meet violence with violence.
- The courage to surrender and trust to God completely in Gethsemane ... *"Not my will Father, but let Your will be done"*.
- The courage to put the spirit of mercy and compassion over the rigid Law, and to show these divine qualities of love, to all his neighbours (whoever the neighbour may be).

And even the courage to love those who would hurt and persecute him.

And he took all these convictions, all the way to the Cross.

And when out of fear, humanity did its very worst to him... How did Jesus respond? Jesus found the courage to say, **"Father forgive them for they know not what they do."**

Not once did Jesus let fear, compromise His integrity to do the right thing.

**And this for me, is why Jesus Christ is still,
the most compelling figure in human history? He was when I came to faith and still is.**

If I was to ask you... what's the central belief at the heart of the Gospel?

Most of us would say that it's the saving power of the Cross.

Well here's a challenging thought.

**The saving power of the cross, is built on the foundation
of one man's courage to always do the right thing.**

No Courage, no saving power.



SO BACK TO THE BIG QUESTION FOR THIS DAY

How does this extraordinary day, speak into our extraordinary times?

Is it an exaggeration to say that we stand at a Crossroads?

I don't believe it is.

In all the conversations about the current crisis and all the diverse opinions, pretty much everyone agrees on one thing. We've entered a paradigm shift, and everything will be changed by this. None of us are quite sure *how*, but we sense, that there's no returning to an old 'normal', and nor should we.

One of the best sayings I heard these past weeks, is that we should "**never waste a crisis**". If this is a wake-up call, as many believe, then there's no point in a wake-up call, if when it's all over we simply fall back asleep.

BUT HAVE WE GOT THE COURAGE REQUIRED, TO DO THE RIGHT THING?

- **Have we got courage to look in the mirror, individually and collectively and ask, how can we do this better?**

We've all had a jolt – we've all had an opportunity for a re-think.

We've all glimpsed some deep insights about the way we've been living.

- **But have we got the courage to not deny and betray these insights, so that we don't slide back into the old ways? And unlike Peter, will we match our bold words with actions.**
- **Have we got the courage to put compassion and kindness for our neighbours, before our own vested self-interests? To stop selling our souls for the lure of money and materialism. To stop sacrificing the environment for thirty pieces of silver.**
- **Have we got the courage to challenge our own fickle natures? Like Jesus be prepared to take the risk and take the cost... to do the right thing?**
- **And when all of this feels a little complicated or overwhelming... have we got the courage to not do a Pilate, and wash our hands of the whole challenge?**

I'll finish with this thought.

I think we all realise that we're going through a journey of loss of one kind or another. And where there is loss, there will always be pain.

But how we deal with loss, and how we deal with pain... is what determines how we find meaning and hope.

And these words from Richard Rohr for me, goes to the heart of this truth.

“All great spirituality is about what we do with our pain. Creation has a pattern of wisdom; and we dare not shield ourselves from it, or we literally will lose our soul. We can believe in doctrines, and attend church services all our lives and still daily lose our souls... **if we run from the necessary cycle of loss and renewal.** Death and resurrection are lived out at every level of the cosmos, but only one species thinks it can avoid it—the human species.” Richard Rohr

If we are to emerge from this journey with meaning and a re-imagined hope, I believe we have to understand the lesson of the Cross.

Courage has to win out, over our fears. The courage to confront all our denials and betrayals, and like Jesus, to do the right thing. Courage is the call for our times.

ON A SLIDE FOR REFLECTION

We're going to have some to reflect as music plays quietly

Reflect on these words from Mary Anne Radmacher ... and hear what the Spirit is saying to you this Good Friday.

Courage doesn't always roar, sometimes courage is the silent voice at the end of the day that says... "tomorrow I will try again".

- What truth about yourself and our ways of living, have you found in this time of crisis and lockdown.
- Where have you sensed loss and how can you find re-birth and renewal in this journey of loss?
- Where do you need to find the courage of Christ, to not deny or betray these truths learned?