

St. Margaret's Uniting Church Mooroolbark

Sunday 14th May, 2017
5th Sunday of Easter

EPISTLE READING 1 Peter 2:2-10

<http://bible.oremus.org/?q|=361663050>

GOSPEL READING John 14:1-14 *Jesus the Way to the Father*

<http://bible.oremus.org/?q|=361662316>

REFLECTION ON THE SCRIPTURES

In the name of the Lord, Jesus Christ, I pray that you grant us faith, and courage, and a sense of your presence that we may be living stones for you.

In the name of Christ, I pray that you grant us peace within our homes and our community.

In the name of Christ, I pray that the killing of innocent children and use of chemical weapons will stop now in Syria.

In the name of Christ, I pray that we see the end of ISIS and other acts of terror in the name of whatever destructive ideology ...

In the name of Christ, I pray that people who are in indefinite detention because they seek asylum find their release.

In the name of Christ, I pray that tensions between North Korea and the United States do not escalate.

In the name of Christ ...

Oh it is hard! What are we to make of the promise from Jesus that ends our gospel reading today? *'If in my name you ask me for anything, I will do it.'*

Well then Jesus, what about continuing wars and acts of terror? What about famine in parts of Africa? What about displacement of so many innocent men, women and children who just wish to have food to eat and a place to live in peace? What about those close to us who suffer or who cause us pain? What about our struggles and wish that our hearts were not troubled?

We find ourselves in the part of John's gospel that is Jesus' farewell speech to the disciples. It is the pep talk from the leader, the thing that prepares them to go it alone without their master. In this and in the words that follow, we, like the disciples, are being equipped for ministry beyond Jesus' death and resurrection. In other words, this is equipping for you and me today.

While there are parts of this speech that seem quite straight-forward, there are also many that have troubled and perplexed faithful disciples ever since we've been studying these words of Jesus.

Our lived reality seems so different to at least a couple of things that we have heard today. Other than the struggle to make sense of asking anything in the name of Jesus, we struggle with the size of the commissioning Jesus gives the disciples.

Very truly, I tell you, the one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these, says Jesus.

If we are not careful, both these statements can leave us anything but encouraged and equipped to minister in the absence of Jesus. I can't honestly say that I do (or expect to do) greater works than Jesus the Christ. And my prayers about world peace or asylum seekers perhaps show that my faith is not strong enough ...

Unless, that is, we have not understood what Jesus is saying here.

What if, what if the greater works are not about you or me as individuals, but about what we do together as the church of Jesus Christ? In that case, would it not mean that any faithful disciple builds upon the foundation of all who are faithful before us. Christ is our cornerstone, and we become living stones that build a church that does

greater works by building upon that foundation. And if that is true, then all who follow him, in any time or place, play a part in the greatness and glory of God.

(see <http://www.crivoice.org/biblestudy/bbjohn17.html> re commentary from Barnabas Lindars).

It seems that this view is spoken of in our 1 Peter (2:2-10) reading.

Like newborn infants, long for the pure, spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow into salvation— if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is good.

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

Let yourselves be built into a spiritual house ... to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

And this brings us back to where we began – by longing for a world that is different, and being confused asking Jesus for anything in his name.

For in the world of Jesus, praying in the name of someone is perhaps not the same thing that we might think today. Rather 'in the name of' is more akin to being faithful to, or authorised by, or reflecting the character of.

On this Mother's Day, we reflect on important women in our lives. I'm sure you can all recall particular sayings from your mother or other significant guardian in your life. It isn't too hard to imagine in a new situation what your mother would think or say. Even when they have gone to glory, we can still invoke the memory and character of one so close and important in our lives.

This is the spirit of what Jesus is saying. 'Ask for anything in my name, and I will do it' – is asking that God's will be done, on earth as it is in heaven. It doesn't amount to the kind of prayer I once uttered as a boy where I prayed for a model train set to miraculously appear under my

bed. But it does amount to what we heard before, where Jesus says that those who follow him will do greater works in his name. *Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.*

We are now perhaps getting closer to being equipped to live as disciples without Jesus physically in our midst. I hope it is now a bit clearer that praying for that big Lotto win is perhaps not the kind of prayer Jesus calls us to. But what then of world peace, or perhaps peace within our homes? Surely this belongs to the will of God and can be something we ask for?

I think the answer is yes, but ... it comes with a catch. The catch is that we are called as disciples to do greater works than Jesus himself. And the call of God is upon us to be food for the hungry, and clothing for the naked, homes for the homeless, release for those in prison.

In other words, when we pray in the name of Jesus, we invite the Father and the Holy Spirit to equip us to do as Jesus has done. When we pray we pray to be the body of Christ in this place, the hands and feet of our living Lord Jesus Christ.

If that seems troubling or daunting, we are reminded of the words of our counsel, our leader, our Lord. 'Do not let your hearts be troubled', says Jesus. Through him we find ourselves in the very home and heart of God. Jesus is our way to the salvation offered by God. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. And if we find ourselves united in the house of God, then perhaps, just perhaps, we might find enough to take a small step, and then another, towards peace in our homes, towards peace in the world.

For the sake of those we love;
for the sake of those who suffer the atrocities of war;
for the sake of those who are detained or pushed aside;
for those who are in need of deep peace.

In the name of Christ, may it be so. Amen.