

A Community at Mission

Fourth Sunday of Easter (C)

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Last time I spoke, I described the church as a set of interlocking communities. We are:

- A community of peace,
- A community at mission,
- A community of care,
- A prophetic community,
- A community of witness.
- A community of power.

We began with the community of peace with the words.

Jesus came and stood among them

This is the beginning point of being church - Jesus in our midst. It is symbolised by the Paschal Candle, but it needs to be a reality in this place. Jesus must be at the centre. He must stand among us in all that we do and say. But this is not enough. Jesus standing among us is the starting point for our mission. It is too easy to see Jesus as a rallying point. To define our calling as being the people gathered around Jesus. Whereas there is value in the contemplative dimension, it is there to equip us and send us out into the world.

We gather at Jesus feet in word and sacrament, not on a personal quest for salvation, rather in coming to the source of life for our ongoing mission. Christianity is not about being in God Space but being God Space in the world.

Thus, the presence of Christ in our midst has profound implications in our going forth into the world. This was the mistake of the disciples. They assumed that this phenomenon had no implication on life. They just went back to Galilee to continue life – to continue fishing. They assumed that the profound events of the resurrection had no further call on them, but this was not the case. Jesus met them there and in again called them to action and commissioned them. It is easy to try and see faith as having no implication on life. To do our church things and then return to the world. But resurrection demands total commitment. The cross is not for a moment, but for a life and our call to take up that cross, is a call to make a priority of the things of Christ. Why the church is ineffective is not the evil in the world, but the apathy within the membership.

Mission is not an optional extra, or something that we are called to do when we have time. Mission is what we do as Christians. It is the outpouring of our Baptismal promise. It is the reason for the gift of the Spirit. Although the military images have gone out of favour in certain quarters, this is what Christianity means – being available to God, anytime and anywhere. It is not something that we can fit in around our busy lives. It rather something that is the framework of our life. Jesus did not say to Peter “Feed my Sheep/Lambs”, “when you have nothing else to do!!”

This begs the question – What is it that makes you unavailable?

The image of a community at mission is one of all working together. The eleven areas we specified in the diocese of Ballarat, Evangelism, Ethics/Social responsibility, Ecumenism, Children, Stewardship, Worship, Pastoral, Mission (Overseas), Youth, Spirituality and Lay Ministry are the dimensions of this mission, and whereas we may not be engaged in them all, we must be engaged in at least some for the sake of the Gospel.

It is easy for us to be complacent, to believe that is all being done, but there is just so much to do. One the significant problems in working with the various councils and Executives is that we are becoming acutely aware of our failing to act rather than our action. In every Christian community it is always the same, so much is left to so few.

The starting point to become a community at mission is the recognition of our need to be doing things for God, rather than for ourselves, our families or our communities. Are you available?

Christianity is not the easy way. Think of these words of Jesus.

Jesus said to Peter, Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

The one who stood in our midst has now moving out into the world. This calling to follow Christ was not an easy one and meant denying a lot of what is some much human instinct. This is the cost of discipleship.

In our society looking for a free lunch, Christians should stand out as being different. When Jesus said, “Follow me” to Peter it was to all who would follow on as well. It is only as we are prepared to do this, that we will be part of this Community at Mission.

Jesus says – Follow me! But what do we say?

Christ is Risen

He is Risen Indeed, Alleluia!

AMEN