



Rev Diana Rattray Have you understood all this?

Ordinary 17
Romans 8:26-39
Matt 13:31-33, 44-52
30 July 2023

On Thursday morning I went to the dawn blessing of Te Komititanga and 1 Queens Street. Following the tragic shootings a week earlier, Ngāti Whātua Ōrākei led all present through a three part ceremony, te whakawātea - to clear, te whakatea -to mourn and te whakaora, to heal, It was attended by family and friends of those who died, many of the workers on the building site, and their bosses, as well as some civic and national leaders.

Te Komititanga means to mix or to merge, the mixing of the waters of Te Waihorotiu, the fresh water stream which runs underneath Queen Street, and the Waitemata, the harbour. It is also the place of mixing and merging of people as they emerge from ferries, buses, and trains at Britomart. The paving stones on which we stood, in the rather cold wind, form a whāriki (welcome mat) laid like a harakeke, flax weaving. The karakia, the korero and the waita lead those present from a place of darkness to light, as the day dawned. There were people of all faiths and none, and many were visibly moved. It was hard to describe yet the shift was palpable.

As I reflected on the readings for this Sunday, and the parables Jesus used as part of his teaching discourse in Matthew, I saw again that we are not supposed to read and understand in a logical rational approach. Perhaps we are better to approach it with our imagination rather than our intellect.

The parables Jesus tells are literally down to earth - farming, housewife, fishermen doing everyday things. It is a telling of the mystery of the meeting of the divine and human in Jesus Christ. He talks of real life people going about their daily lives. He transforms human life not by scaring them but by telling **them that God's realm is close at hand. Yet we don't always know it or recognise it.**

Two fish are swimming along and they come to an old fish. The old fish says **"Morning boys, isn't the water lovely today?"** The two young fish continue swimming along and once they are out of earshot one fish says to the other - what the heck is water?¹

These parables are about the realm of God, yet it is so hard to explain what that is - when you are in the midst of it. Jesus is like the old fish, he cannot explain it by rationale or argument. All he can do is use story - parables - for the realm of God - it is more than a set of ideas. They are difficult to understand and the disciples do not seem to understand them.

After telling them parables of mustard seed, yeast, treasure, pearls, and a fishing net Jesus asked - **"Have you understood all this?"** They answered **"yes."**

I am not sure I could answer that question so succinctly. Perhaps it was the same with the blessing on Thursday morning. Words, actions, silence, rituals breathed life and hope into a place of death and despair. Have I understood - no - do I believe transformation occurred - absolutely.

Perhaps rather than looking for the smallest thing that was lost, we can instead hold onto the good news that in the smallest of things, the hardest of things is Atua, God, Love.

¹ Rt Rev Kelvin Wright. www.calledsouth.org.nz/gospel-conversations/

Parables might be open ended and offer different perspectives. What we can be sure of is that in Jesus we see the overwhelming love that God has for us.

As we move closer to a general election in October there is increased point scoring and putting others down in the political realm. This is often communicated to us by mainline and social media.

In the letter to the Romans Paul reminds the recipients, indeed all of us, that he doesn't have to win by beating others. **Jesus followers are called to participate in God's work of being companions to others. Walking alongside them as equals.** Love is against making others losers at our expense, even though that runs contrary to much of the rhetoric in his and indeed our day.

The final part of today's Roman's reading, was also our sentence for today.

Neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

It is in the funeral service from our New Zealand Prayerbook. The relevance of these words is not restricted to death - they also speak of separation. Every choice we make necessarily separates us from another option. We cannot do everything, and when we do anything we must exclude something. At the very heart of being human is being separated from the people and things we love or things that may restrict us from giving or receiving love.

Paul doesn't predict the future nor does he pretend to have powers that don't exist. He lives authentically and vulnerably because he knows that God is loving. Paul stakes everything on God's goodness and that goodness is the heart of the gospel that he preaches.

The realm of God, like the mustard seed, invades the cultivated soil of our certainties and our boundaries and creates out of it all something new. Hidden within what we think we see so clearly, or what we think we understand, it grows in unexpected ways until what we thought we knew is transformed and redeemed by God.²

This week may we broaden all that we think and see so that the smallest act, the smallest thought will grow and transform within ourselves and we in turn can bring light, and hope in our troubled and hurting world.

Te Komititanga and the building at 1 Queen Street were reset by karakia to be returned to normal use. At the end we sang this waiata.

Te aroha. Te whakapono. Me te rangimarie. Tatou Tatou e.
Love, hope, peace, for us all.

So may it be.
Amen.

² Feasting the Word p286