



Pivot Time
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Year B, Christmas 1
Galatians 4:4-7; Luke 2: 22-40
31 December 2023

Late afternoon during the last week, while taking a cooling off dip in the ocean at my local beach, we noticed a kayak being paddled across the bay in a most comedic fashion.

I think it was one of those partially inflatable kayaks. It appeared to have three people in it. One sitting at the rear with a short single bladed paddle, one sitting at the front of the kayak with a similar single bladed paddle. Our guess was, in the interests of sharing, a double paddle that would normally be pushed together had been left as two. The person in the middle was standing, this one was wielding a double ended paddle.

Each person was paddling, with varying degrees of enthusiasm. The one standing in the middle seemed most energised but their technique was compromised. The paddle was not made for stand up paddling and they seemed unaware the blade was shaped to be more effective if used one way rather than another. Further the paddlers didn't appear to have a coordinated approach, each was paddling as they pleased, often as not in the opposite direction to the other. They were sort of going somewhere in a very circular manner.

After a while the person at the back decided to simply recline and enjoy the scenery.

After watching for a while we began to get a bit concerned as they were drifting out a bit deeper, and the occasionally gusting off shore wind was beginning to push them out beyond the shelter of the bay. We then noticed a sit-on kayak paddle toward them, the adult sitting in the middle between two children seemed a little more adept at paddling. There was some sort of exchange between them. Shortly afterward the two single paddles were joined and there seemed a little more consistency in the direction as they, still with circularity but less outward drift, made their way back across the bay.

The people on the drifting kayak were not rescued, they were perhaps given some hints and clues along the way that enabled them to paddle more effectively, to orient themselves. It was not presumed they didn't have the capacity or resource in context to manage.

Today is New Year's Eve, a pivot moment, one generally sanctioned to be the time we look back and look forward, a time of ending and of beginning.

Time to reflect looking back. 2023's been a challenging year in many ways both nationally and internationally. The effect of climate crisis writ large in natural disasters, new and continuing wars across international borders, economic hardship, the rise in right wing ideological and political leadership, the rich getting richer and the poor poorer, ballooning mental ill health among our young ones. Each of these and all accumulate to challenge, unsettle and deeply disturb us. Although mostly outside us, we experience them

in us, layering upon our negotiation with the vicissitudes of our own life.

Like the poorly coordinated paddlers in their kayak, the complexity of these pressures can push us this way and pull us that. Disoriented we can begin to feel ourselves adrift, at the mercy of the winds in our times pushing us into danger, beyond our resources.

As I watched the rather hapless paddlers, I noticed I harbored an inherent notion that the point of paddling a kayak is to go from one point to another with greatest efficiency. Musing as I was on this as a metaphor for life as we look back on what seems a challenging 2023, it made me wonder whether we harbour an inherent notion that a successful life has a clear direction. We expect a clear arc for life, to set an aim and go forth. We get frustrated, feel guilty, as if we fail if we don't achieve the aim. Life, messy daily life is incidental to, in fact interferes with getting to the somewhere of that aim.

The thing is life **is** complex, complicated, disorienting, at times utterly confusing. Which makes it rich, diverse and worthwhile yet also difficult and elusive to control. And maybe that's why we want to make a plan and keep to it. Maybe that's why the chaos of life in our world in 2023 seems so overwhelming, it's not as it should be!!

In this season of Christmas, Mary and Joseph and of course new born Jesus are of particular focus. Despite the way we stitch the story together and sanitise it for holiness, Mary and Joseph were thrown in the deep end of this unexpected baby business. It's not as if Mary and Joseph had a plan and kept to it. People unknown to them, outside their lives and often outsiders, angels, shepherds, male and female prophets

pointed and nudged and told them. If you listen closely, often as not Mary and Joseph are as surprised as the next person to hear what's told them of Jesus.

Mary and Joseph are faithful to the religious tradition of their identity. They follow the traditions, the steady rhythms of life imbued in them. From this deep source the unlikely messengers and guides appear as pointers and connectors as they navigate territory unknown.

Mary and Joseph may receive nudges and messages but they're not rescued, not given everything or anything to fix all or any problems. They have the resources within and between them to negotiate the tumult of the world they walk through, to continue and to figure things out as they go along.

Touch points and places help steady us, not to do for or add resources, as if we've insufficient, but to help us to see and perhaps to choose to redistribute what we have so we can negotiate the territory of life with lesser sense of helpless chaos. We have still and steady places such as this to still and steady and guide us. Just as we receive so too we can be and do this in the rich chaos that is life for one another.