



## Faith in Real Time

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Acts 11:1-18; John 13: 31-35

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I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.

Today's short gospel, part of Jesus' farewell discourse is also read on Maundy Thursday as part of the foot washing service.

We're pretty strong in claiming this as our identity. **This** makes us a distinct and different. How do you think we're doing? How's being known for our love for one another going?

On Maundy Thursday we also Reaffirm Ordination Vows and Bless the Oils. Held at the Cathedral, the preacher this year was The Rev'd Shona Pink-Martin, a colleague from our Maori tikanga. She spoke to the readings of the day which referred to the Jubilee year. A Jubilee year occurs every 50 years, in it no agricultural work's to be done, all slaves are to be set free and all land returned to its original owners - ensuring land doesn't concentrate in a small number of hands. Shona paused and asked us "How many times do you think a Jubilee year has been kept in all the years since then?" Exactly never!

I began to wonder whether there was something in common between the Jubilee year reading and the gospel reading for this day. Of an ideal set before us we **really** want to commit ourselves to and live out, without ever actually doing it.

Interestingly, we don't let it go, we don't say "Oh it's so ridiculous, maybe we could edit it out!" So they still speak to us, still call out from us a potential, a possibility. I wonder how often we turn and face such aspiration and our apparent failure to live up to it. I don't mean in a self-berating way, I mean quietly, gently, with compassion, face the reality we're really not very good at it. Or maybe that sometimes we are and become curious about what came together for us to make it real. Or maybe we could ask questions about what "love for one another" actually means when it's being lived out.

My observation is that Jesus was quite pragmatic. Portrayed as taking time out to pray, for sure, but when he reengages it's not in esoteric thought, it's in enacted response. It makes me wonder whether "love for one another" is less about how you **feel** about the person and more about a decision to act for the good of the other. Not, I might add, what **you** think is the good for the other person. But, risking yourself to the vulnerability of relationship with the other person, learning from them how you can be a part of contributing to their flourishing. And uncovering in the process your own brilliance that, as you allow it to be nurtured means you, too flourish as the gift you are for the world.

But all this does require risk, personal risk. Admitting to yourself and to someone outside yourself that you don't have your shit together and you can't get with a self-made success plan. Riskier still, you begin to question the measure or meaning of success. It can put you out of sync with a system that dictates it's about acquisition of goods and power over.

Is it actually possible to live with a different set of priorities? I mean realistically, not ideologically, the theory of it's always possible!

In the season of Easter we're directed to include the weekly reading from Acts. As Helen mentioned a couple of weeks back, these are stories of a fledgling community, not yet called church, a mostly Jewish community, followers of the Way Jesus had demonstrated. Ordinary, confused people like you and I.

Each week we hear of different characters. Paul whose struck down, blind until outsiders from the community of the Way he was persecuting, bring him to himself he then joins them. Faithful Tabitha/Dorcas is surrounded by and embedded in faith filled community, at their behest Peter acts and she's restored to life. And today Peter steps beyond the bounds of the faith community. Although a dream warms Peter up to the idea, the directive to act, revelation and new insight again come from outsiders.

We could hear today's story as a salient reminder to us. Be wary of assuming certainty in ideas about God and be aware of our desire to want to contain or control the profligate over spilling abundance of divine grace.

But to return to that question of realistic versus ideological. Is it realistic to expect the radical requirements of the Jubilee year to be enacted in real time? Is it realistic to expect to be a community of people known for the love they have for one another in real time? Or are these plain ideological?

The stories from Acts show us somethings. Saul, the tyrannical oppressor is included, through the ministrations of a terrified faith community he discovers a new way to see. The support and love of the faith filled community surrounding Tabitha/Dorcas calls Peter to act and there's restoration. Outsiders to the faith community call Peter to act. The unbounded inclusiveness of divine belonging is revealed to insiders who've assumed they've divine priority.

When we read stories like this, located in a set apart context we name scripture, do we see the characters portrayed in them as equally set apart? They're other than us, unlike us, more faithful or capable. Perhaps we rationalise that the events are portrayed to persuade, they're not to be taken literally. There's likely virtue in this. But along the way do we also come to diminish what we think possible? Do we stop expecting, as a member of a community of faith filled people, that we actually can make any difference?

I suspect the Peter's and Saul/Paul's we hear of, the Tabitha/Dorcas's were every bit as complicated, convoluted and consistently mucking up people as we are. We only get to hear some highlights and they've traversed the territory of oral storytelling from the mouths of those with a vested interest in what's to be communicated.

But something in real time happened else we wouldn't still be wrestling with it. Something that was radically transformative, that overturned expectations of what was possible, that emerged out of the passion, energy and faith of a committed community who knew their need of one another and was resilient enough to eventually welcome in breaking insights from outsiders.

It might give us pause to ask, if we the faith filled community of people in this place and time don't think such radical transformation can be made real in time, don't expect to overturn expectations of what is possible, will there continue to be something to wrestle with?