

PENTECOST 16 THE PASSOVER –

TRIBES PASSING THROUGH THE RED SEA AND THE SEA OF FORGIVENESS ALONG THE WAY

It's fair to say all humans **are bound together** by some form of tribalism.
Tribes!

Tribes are the basic unit by which humans are organized into a meaningful life.

Some of you might recall from the 1980s the lovely song of praise **“Bind us together Lord, Bind us together with chords that cannot be broken”**

I remember during the 1980s many UCA camps sitting around the camp fire singing **“Bind us together”** arms linked feeling like I want this feeling of peace and harmony to stay with me forever.

I loved the feeling of being bound together with my young Christian tribe – that feeling I realise now, may have had a lot to do with teenage hormones!!

So to tribes...

We have Christian tribes – like MUC - one large tribe made up of smaller tribes.

A bit like the tribes of Israel.

Within the big Christian family we have Catholic tribes, Orthodox tribes, Pentecostal tribes and so it goes on.

Then we have our religious tribes: Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Indigenous spirituality tribes and so it goes on.

What keeps tribes knitted together with a sense of purpose and meaning?

All tribes have archetypal features including: beliefs, stories, values, rituals, songs, prayers, rites of passage, life cycle celebrations and activities.

Do you know there is a great word to describe this tribalness of ‘binding humans together’?

That word is RELIGARE.... Latin for Religion.... Religare = religion....

Let's practice rolling our 'rs' like Latinos and say together 'religare'!

Religare-religion means to:

bind together, to hold, to glue, to knit together, to weave together with common beliefs, stories, values, rituals, songs etc

Religion is the elastic band that holds all the parts together!

Now - there was a BIG religious tribal religious gathering on Friday night at the MCG as 2 tribes gathered with an epic 96,000 people for the AFL semi-final between CARLTON and MELBOURNE

The Apokis family are die hard Carlton supporters. We belong to the Carlton tribe.

♪ "We are the navy blues...." ♪

The Carlton tagline is **BOUND BY BLUE!**

Our colour, our song, our passion, our belief, our commitment binds us together .

But as we know within any tribe - despite our common beliefs life together in a tribe is not all tea and biscuits!

There are some VERY difficult, challenging, annoying and vulnerable people within our tribes!

It just so happened on Friday night that Sally, Con and our son Jude were sitting between 3 very difficult challenging, annoying and dare I say vulnerable drunk young men.

These young men were highly charged, highly wired, extremely anxious, extremely excited, and extremely angry and shouty at every part of the game: the same vulgar language was screamed at umpires, the opposition and Carlton players.

Con and I have ministered and worked amongst similar folk over the years.

We know how to pastorally and professional diffuse situations.

However as we had our own interests at heart we simply wanted to enjoy the game and not have to manage drunken behavior.

Con tried to diffuse one of the guys 3 times. Let's call him Matthew.

Matthew's drunkenness got to a tipping point so Con gave the guy an ultimatum.

If Mathew didn't calm down and stop the violent language Con would call security.

I tried to be the school teacher and use tactics I know helps bring 14 yo challenging school boys into line. That clearly didn't work and I got a mouthful from Matthew!

Matthew pleaded with Con NOT to get security. "Can't a guy enjoy himself? I love Carlton, can't I enjoy myself I am not hurting anyone?" His girlfriend pleaded, "please don't call security Matthew is just enjoying himself!"

My son Jude who works in hospitality and knows how to diffuse drunk males, also tried settle Matthew and put the challenge to him that we as a family were there to enjoy ourselves also too. "And you wouldn't like me speaking to your mum in the way you spoke to my mum?"

"We're all here because we love the Blues." Said Jude.

Matthew then bargained with Con and said if he didn't get security he'd promise not to swear and he'd stop yelling.

A miracle happened!

Matthew changed! He literally snapped out of it! He became reasonable, he changed his tune...

"Yeh, we all love the Blues, we want them to win, we are BOUND by the Blues, I'm sorry for how I have been behaving" he said in a humble tone.

Through the roar of the crowd, I put my hands together in the prayer position and showed my gratitude for his apology.

THISwas our Red Sea moment where we... as a little tiny tribe of Carlton left our Pharaoh selves behind passed through the choppy seas and was restored to a state of peace, our relationships restored in our common vision, our common belief our common purpose.

The *red sea* was parted and despite the difficulties we walked through that sea together... so that in the final minute of the game when Carlton kicked the winning goal///// Matthew, Con and Jude hugged each other, tearful, delirious with joy, singing our common song... 🎵 'we are the navy blues'

This experience for me was an absolute miracle.

This ratbag young Blues male would not realise the profound impact he had on me and my family.

This young man would not realise the profound impact he had on my faith....taking me deeper into the Passover story and deeper into Jesus story of forgiveness...

Forgiveness within our tribe is never easy.

Imagine what our churches and what our world would be like if forgiveness WAS easy!

Because of our complex humanity, forgiveness is: messy, people are a nuisance, we are short tempered, at times irrational, we are stropky, riddled with insecurities, we are exhausted, we are vulnerable, we are fragile, we can be aggressive and nasty.

Yet our God knows only too well our tribes are riddled with these complexities and with such people as Matthew and such people as you and me...

But here's the thing. The tribe is more than its parts and thank God our Christian tribe is not just the responsibility of me or you!

For us Christians we are more than the individual

'We are the Body of Christ' We are BOUND together whether we like it or not!

Like the exquisite knitting, stitching and quilting of many of our MUC members, we are knitted, stitched and quilted together. A patch work mosaic people of God.

Our belief and faith is in the God of the Hebrews, Jesus of Nazareth and the Spirit leading us through deserts, the wilderness, dangerous seas and church amalgamations to green pastures and still waters.

In our journey we have our eyes, set on destination 'freedom' - with everyday miracles along the way - like Matthew's repentance and seeking forgiveness.

NOW.. you may or not be wondering ... was Sally with the blokes having a jubilant exhilarating hug when the siren went at the MCG with a miraculous win by 2 points in the dying minutes?

No she wasn't! Where was she?

She was at home on the couch celebrating with her tribe of 1!

And why was that?

Well on the other side of Sally at the MCG was a very disturbed young man. I could see clearly he was mentally unwell. And he was also scarily volatile and angry.

This guy we will call Luke and had what my son Zak who has 2 little boys, would call, a 'potty mouth' Luke's language was from the sewer. It was vulgar and disgusting and I found his rage scary.

For 2 quarters I had him in my ear.

By the 2nd quarter my empathy and pastoral radar went into over time thinking about what may have happened in Luke's life and in his experience of family, for him to be so unwell and angry.

And then that led to a stream of thoughts about one of my areas of passion being the spirituality and wellbeing of boys and young men in general, an area I have spent part of my vocational life immersed in creating meaningful ways in schools and universities to lift boys sense of identity and connection through humour, engaging education and activities, listening to their stories, and their vulnerabilities.

Then I went national in my thinking about the abhorrent state of affairs for young indigenous kids incarcerated in some of the worst juvenile detention centres in the world and thinking of young 14 y.o. boys who live a life of crime stealing cars, kidnapping other 14 y.o.s after school, stealing their phones and trying to murder them by pushing them out of moving cars.

Here I am at the MCG meant to be enjoying my religion of football but I can't help thinking about the the hurts of humanity and how God could possibly reach this guy.

Added to this I suffer from an inherited auditory condition called misophonia which can hook in with mental health issues which developed and became debilitating during the pandemic.

Misophonia is where certain sounds and the volume of sounds, goes straight to the trauma primal brain and releases a flood of hormones leading to immediate feelings of threat, anger, panic, lack of focus and the need to flee.

So all in all by half time I was in a bad way!

The only think I have learnt from an auditory specialist that can help when misophonia is inflamed is to manage my circumstances and that means getting away from the provoking sounds.

So... much to Con's annoyance because we paid good \$ to see the semi-final and he doesn't really get what misophonia feels like for me, I went home to South Melbourne to pick up the game on the TV at the 4th quarter and had a much more enjoyable celebration with my tribe of 1!

But of course my misophonia and needing to leave makes me feel like a complete odd ball! The only person it seemed out of 96,000 people who couldn't handle the energy, the human behavior, the noise of what should be a very bonding religious experience!

But this made me reflect on the wonderful ways technology really does keep us connected, united, together in spirit and in truth sharing our spiritual experiences with our friends on zoom and online.

Where ever we are, like the Jewish diaspora, we can be united in the beliefs and actions of our tribe.

And for Christians we know as the Body of Christ we are called to hold and care for the weak, the vulnerable and the difficult.

In Exodus, in Egypt, the Hebrews at the Passover escaping cruel Pharaoh, had to flee their homes and run for their lives following Moses and Miriam and like all refugees leaving behind their possessions and in their houses.

The bread hadn't risen so they only had flat hard unrisen bread – matzo - for their journey ahead as God led them into their future.

Let's hear now from New York Rabbi Menachem Creditor share about the significance of Passover for the Jewish community and look out for his insights that may encourage us with our Christian faith and journey.

PASSOVER VIDEO https://youtu.be/Ej6n_2KJ_OI?si=LNaq6DNzXSwlFv

I'm curious and interested for our community MUC life to reflect on some of the Passover ideas like:

- How might I or we be puffed up like leaven bread? What do I or we need to let go of?
- Do I have unhealthy attachments to things that Jesus may be nudging me to let go of?
- With Climate crisis and cost of living crisis, how can we strengthen our Christian community to face the challenges ahead?
- If 'Matthew' or 'Luke' from the MCG Carlton tribe stories I shared, were to walk through the doors of our Centre and our church, how would we make them welcome and what could we offer them to join to become also, a part of our tribe?

(To conclude)

From this pulpit I see magnificent tribes of Christians who have come together over the past few years to be a new tribe, Manningham Uniting Church. You have crossed through red seas and had pharaoh moments. But God and the Moses and the Miriams have been leading you as you have walked together as a new tribe. You have been an inspiration to me... and to many.. peace be with you...