

## **A Rainbow of Hope**

## **Mathew 25: 31 to 46**

Somewhere, over the rainbow, Skies are blue. And the dreams that you dare to dream, Really do come true. A few years ago, I might have sung that song for you. But that dream has somewhat faded. Those musical buffs will recognise this song from the Wizard of Oz, sung by Judy Garland.

A rainbow. So what is special about a rainbow? you might ask.

### **Let us pray**

As a small boy, after a hot day, I would sit with my grandpa on an old chair outside the back fence, beside the woodheap, a pile of old Mallee stumps Grandpa in his favourite chair, in his flannel singlet, his old work trousers secured by a pair of braces, his old hat sitting to one side shielding his eyes from a setting sun. How I loved that place.

The smell of rain hung in the air. In the distance emerged a rainbow. It stood out against dark, angry clouds moving quickly by. Then it appeared from nowhere, hovered, its colours brightly lit by the setting sun. "Look grandpa a rainbow" I called out. He sat still, quiet, lost in thought. "Is it going to rain grandpa?" I asked. He looked around as though to sniff the air. "Maybe" he said. A gentle wind came out of the west. Thunder rolled by, distant, echoing around the old farmhouse.

"Grandpa, The sky is so dark, it has to rain." There was a long pause. The rainbow, losing its colour, smaller. A few spots of rain, large as they splashed down onto dry Mallee sand, then gone." Is it going to rain here?" I ask again. "Mmm, looks like the rain will swing around to the north. It'll miss the farm this time." Grandpa looked over at me, quiet, unmoved. "Well, I guess our neighbours to the north will get some rain. Perhaps it'll rain here next time" he said. "Why can't it rain here now?" I asked. "It will." said grandpa. "God needs to share his rain around. Its not our turn today." "I thought a rainbow meant rain." I said. Grandpa paused.

"Well son, way back in time, a wise man Noah and his family built an ark. People scoffed. Said he was mad. And the rain came. The animals came two by two. The door closed the ark floated and the waters covered the earth. It was later, when a rainbow appeared in the sky, God made a promise to Noah, A sort of agreement, one man to another". A long pause, "Go ask your grandma to read the story to you," he said.

In Genesis Chapter 9: V13. We read, I have set my bow (rainbow) in the clouds, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. V14 When I will bring clouds over the earth and the bow (rainbow) is seen in the clouds. V15 I will remember my covenant that is between me and you and every living creature of all flesh: and the water shall never again become a flood to destroy all flesh.

There was another time when another man made a promise to his people. Having lived in Zambia in the early 70's during South Africa's apartheid era, I never in my wildest dreams believed apartheid would ever change in South Africa. Nelson Mandela had a very different vision for his people. When elected President of South Africa on the 10 of May 1994, He made a promise to his people, he shared his dream of a diverse nation made up of people of all colours, from all backgrounds, both the rich and the poor, embracing all religions, and many different languages.

He called it a rainbow nation: where, never again would one race dominate another in this nation of South Africa. But what could one man do to bring his people together to reconcile all the hurt.

Two years later, I was conducting a planning workshop with the automotive industry just out of Port Elizabeth. A group of engineers from the automotive industry gathered at a large VW factory within a company township. It was my first day there. I was nervous. An Australian working with mostly white engineers in post-apartheid South Africa was a somewhat tense assignment. Sitting opposite me during the lunch break on that first morning was as an old man. Small in stature, his face wrinkled, his hair short, his tight curls turning white, his eyes piercing. He kept looking across the table at me. I was a bit unsure, un-nerved, his olive skinned tanned by the desert sun. He was a member of the local trade union.

I was about to leave the table when he came up to me, held out his hand "I want to thank you" he said, for sitting with me at lunch. This is the first time in my life I have sat with a white man to share a meal." I look into his eyes, tears rolled down his checks and he left to go to his working group led by my friend Jim O'Brien. South Africa was being transformed from its painful past to a renewed hope to become rainbow nation.

From the long Matthew reading, I have selected a few verses to share with you. I want to pick up the reading from verse 37.

And the righteous (the sheep) will answer, “Lord when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink, V38 and when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing, V39 and when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” Then they said to Jesus, “but we never saw **you** hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, did we?” V40 And the king (Jesus) will answer them “Truly I tell you just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

The writer of Matthews gospel makes a very simple point. It is the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, those in prison. Who then are the vulnerable? And because they are vulnerable, they are brothers and sisters of Jesus. If I pause to ponder on that statement, it sort of blows my mind. Because it is not who we are. It is about what we do for the most vulnerable, in our society. Because that is where God is.

Let me take you on a short journey out of Galilee and the time of Matthews gospel, down the road into Gaza City today. Let us walk along a busy back street. People are rushing about. The air is filled with dust, broken buildings. Sitting on a street curb is a child, tired, lost, her dress stained with dirt, her hair unkept falling over her eyes, her lips dry. An old man walks by. He pauses, goes back, and speaks with her. He takes a battered water bag from his shoulder, unscrews the top, and offers the child a drink of his precious water. She draws deeply on water from the old water bag. Words are exchanged, a nod of the old man’s head as he continues his journey. The child returns to her seat on the pavement. This action of the old man is instinctive. The child vulnerable, alone. This old man may know nothing about Jesus. But in another sense he is “In Christ” he recognized a vulnerable child in need, and acts to support her need.

This act by the old man is not about a faith relationship, nor is it about his belief. It is because of a child who is vulnerable. It is that vulnerability that Jesus identifies himself with, whoever they are, young and old alike, as his children. And if this makes any sort of sense to you and me, then perhaps this principle can be extended to embrace all the worlds powerless and needy. Jesus said, “I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink.”

Perhaps, the old man in Gasa is Muslim. But then, does it matter. He cared; he shared life giving water when he did not have to. He is, by his actions, a good man. And can this story of a small child sitting on a street corner be seen

somewhere in Jerusalem. Yes it can, and it does, and it is, because there are vulnerable brothers and sisters in today's Israel. Men and woman who are deeply traumatized by the events unfolding. Their loved ones vulnerable, their whereabouts unknown. Jesus said V40 "Truly I tell you, just as you did it for one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me."

Within our own faith community, we have vulnerable people. Sadly, we heard from some last Sunday at our congregational meeting. How do we reach out to them, the aged in our community, those caring for people suffering from dementia, our children, those with disabilities. For all are vulnerable and loved of God.

Some years ago, I attended a mission workshop at MUC. It was on a Saturday, organized by a friend of Lucas Taylor who came over from South Australia. I remember little about that workshop, but I do remember a quote provided by the workshop leader. It was from a retired Bishop of Canterbury who said. "If you want to find Jesus at work in the world, go find a place where good things happen." God does not just exist within our own faith community. So what does this say about our church, our wider Manningham community. Perhaps we need to ponder on these things, to seek out the vulnerable across our community.

So what about a Rainbow Church? A covenant with God, and our community. Perhaps, as a faith community, we can embrace diversity, invite people of all colours, from all backgrounds, both the rich and the poor, embracing all religions, and many different languages. My dream, is to be a faith community with a permanent rainbow glowing bright above our community where the rain falls on all peoples and does not distinguish differences, but embraces diversity to become a place of hope.

Shortly, we will sing our final hymn. "Make me a channel of your peace." I have two thoughts to share about this hymn. It is what make these words so special. The first is, it's personal. It talks to me in the first person. It invites me, personally, to be a channel of Gods peace. And the second. It invites me, and you to bring to the vulnerable, Gods Peace, Gods Love, Gods Hope, Gods Light, and Gods Joy. But it does not demand. It invites. And to my very good friend David Lord, with whom I share this love affair of this hymn: go well my friend, until we meet again. Amen.