

Manningham Uniting Church 21st April 2024

Easter 4B

Texts: Psalm 23, 1John 3:16-24, John 10:11-18

Theme: Jesus – the Glory of God

Introducing the Theme

Lent is the season to divest yourself of all the things that would diminish your capacity to be a follower of Jesus. Easter is the season to encourage you in all the things that would enable your capacity to be a follower of Jesus.

Last week I used a verse from Hebrews 1:3 to make sense of the Jesus resurrection. *He is the reflection of God's glory and the exact imprint of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word.* (Hebrews 1:3) Jesus is the reflection of God's glory, God's art, a masterpiece of God's very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful message. (Hebrews 1:3)

Whatever you make of the resurrection it is your take on the glory of God. Last week exaggeration was the way I tried to express this - what about your life would you like to exaggerate to witness to the resurrected Jesus. Jesus who is God's glory, God's exaggeration of all that is good in humans and our world.

How do we do this justice in a week where there has been much grief from the tragic stabbings in Bondi and Wakely let alone what is happening in Gaza!

Introduction

Illustration: Adventure Steve! (A Documentary of Steve Martin in Two Pieces)

I have just finished watching a documentary on Steve Martin - an American comedian who you most recently may have come across in his fabulous comedy drama 'Only Murders in the Building'. Of late he has taken to creating cartoons. I found the question posed by this cartoon an interesting way of asking ourselves what we need to exaggerate in our lives as Christians.

Video: Steve! - Adventure (Posing the Question)

So different week same question, different words – What adventure are you currently or could you consider undertaking as a Christian? (pause for thought).

Easter Glory

The followers of Jesus after his death and resurrection were caught up with a weird mixture of grief, confusion and emerging euphoria. They had witnessed something big - the glory of God - and were trying to get their heads around it. Who is this God who resurrects Jesus? What now?

Last week I asked us what will we exaggerate in our lives as followers of the resurrected Jesus who is God's glory, God's art, God's exaggeration?

Illustration: Had trouble what I need to exaggerate? (not a complaint)

Cliché of the congregation leaving the service and greeting the minister as they leave. As you can imagine the number one comment that ministers hear is – “thanks for today” - often code for that had no relevance or impact on my life but there is morning tea! The number two comment that ministers hear is – “that was too long” – often code for that was boring I need my morning tea! You know you are in trouble as a minister when number two becomes one. Of late the one making an inside run in our power point age is “could not make out or hear the PowerPoint properly”.

Last week someone kindly reflected – “I found it hard to ponder what I should exaggerate” - code not sure I got what you were on about. As this gentleman walked on I thought to myself “mmm yes - good thought”.

Looking back, I realised that I skewed my question to doing *new* exaggerations or maybe people thought that they needed to engage in *grand* exaggerations! I should have also asked what now in your or our life together exaggerates as followers of Jesus who is God's glory, God's art, God exaggeration?

Illustration: Baseball - small ball vs big ball

At the risk of being a clichéd bloke using sport as the insight to life - I love the baseball metaphor *small ball* about how to best play baseball.

Small ball is when you try to hit the ball into the gaps within the field. Not exciting but effective in an accumulating kind of way. It contrasts with hitting a home runs - bashing the ball out of the park, very exciting and exhilarating but rare compared with swings & misses.

Christian exaggeration does not need to be grand gestures – home runs but include the everyday gestures - not just home runs but small ball.

Adventures for Jesus

What I think I am suggesting - as followers of Jesus, all our lives are part of exaggerating the glory of God - be they of a small ball or home run variety.

Easter is the time to ponder anew what are our Christian adventures taken or not yet undertaken - be they of a small ball or home run variety. Of course, people are not the only avenue for adventure or exaggeration but they are a big part of it as Christians.

My Exaggeration

If I may share, following the comment after the service I went away last week pondering what is it that I want to exaggerate now as a Christian. As I pondered the people in my life I asked myself what Christian exaggeration and adventure is on my heart?

These reflections were in part prompted by watching Steve Martin! Fair to say Steve Martin and his father had a frustrating relationship. During the documentary he shared how this played out in his life. He wrote a beautiful piece which I recommend you chase up.

Illustration: [The Death of My Father \(New Yorker June 9,2002 by Steve Martin \)](#)

“In his death, my father... did something he could not do in life. He brought our family together.”

“In the early '80s, a close friend of mine, whose own father was killed walking across a street and whose mother committed suicide on Mother's Day, said that if I had anything to work out with my parents, I should do it now, because one day that opportunity would be over. When I heard this remark, I had no idea that I would ever want to work anything out with them, that, in fact, there was anything to work out at all. But it stewed in my brain for years, and soon I decided to try and get to know my parents. I took them to lunch every Sunday I could, and would goad them into talking.”

“It was our routine that after I drove them home from our lunches, my mother and father, now in their 80s, would walk me to the car. I would kiss my mother on the cheek and my father and I would wave or awkwardly say goodbye. But this time we hugged each other and he whispered, 'I love you,' with a voice barely audible. This would be the first time these words were ever spoken between us. I returned the phrase with the same awkward, broken delivery.”

I found this both moving and prompting further reflection.

Conclusion

Of course, the resurrection of Jesus is about hitting the ball out of the park

- It is about world peace
- It is about honouring creation
- It is about end of pain and the celebration of bliss
- It is about life over death

The resurrected Jesus as our shepherd is growing us in the awareness of how much we are part of his God's life. *I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me.*

What does God expect of the followers of the resurrected Jesus? It is not about doing better but the prayerful awareness of how what we do is aligned with the glory of God.

Not all adventure or exaggeration needs to be grand - it can be small ball.

- It is also about dinner with your family
- It is also about being the carer your spouse needs
- It is also catching up with mates to play tennis or learn something together
- It is also about hanging out at the playgroup
- It is also about chatting with people at the Red Gum Cafe
- It is also the sadness as we hand our loved ones to God
- It is also about sharing at morning tea the more delicious the better
- It is also about more wine, dancing and singing together.

As my mother would allude...“Never trust a religion that you cannot dance to”!

Quote: Woody Allen “80% of outcomes are little more than the result of turning up”.

The fact is that for most of us, family and friends are the most obvious places to affirm our Christian exaggerations and any new adventures - so too for me.

Illustration: Fallout with a family member

A few years ago, I fell out with a family member, it did not help that I took legal proceedings against them, and certainly was unhelpful that I was vindicated. Since then, fair to say that this family member has vowed not to talk to me again. All very sad as we are both avowed Christians. I went away last week and thought gee reconciling is piece of God's exaggeration I would love to adventure.

The resurrected Jesus offers his Spirit to abide in us and abide in each other.

“All who obey his commandments abide in him, and he abides in them. And by this we know that he abides in us, by the Spirit that he has given us.”

As our theme for the year invites: The Way of Love (Love God and Love Neighbour).