

## **Christchurch Cathedral Easter Day 2014**

**Christ is risen, he is risen indeed. Col 3; Acts 10: 34, Matt28:1ff**

Nearly 60 years ago, a Northern Territory government official, witnessed a resurrection of a political fugitive. And because of a wink he may have changed the course of Australian political history, when he thought it encouraged him to make a last attempt to persuade the Russian spy to defect to Australia. Vladimir Petrov astonished the nation in 1954 by defecting while working in the Russian embassy in Canberra. Russian guards bundled Petrova his wife onto a plane in Mascot before they were later disarmed at Darwin airport, where Petrova met Reginald Leydin, the acting Administrator of the NT. She winked at Leydin, but refused his offer of a private chat. Having given up hope that Petrova would seek asylum, Leydin said, 'Goodbye and goodluck.'

Robert Manne in his book *the Petrov Affair*, suggests that Petrova's wink drew Leydin back for one last try. This time she agreed and she too defected. Robert Manne later believed that the 'wink' was just a facial tick SMH Tony Stephens – (Mar 04). Such a moment was one of those life changing turning points when what seemed an inevitable loss, held the invitation, the 'wink' or nod for a new future.

Julian of Norwich 14<sup>th</sup> century mystic and saint, says that God also 'winks' at us in the course of events that seem impossible to understand. When a destructive and oppressive situation grabs our attention, she says it is God who beckons to us from it. This is the numinous, from a latin word (numen), meaning to 'nod, to beckon'. God is signalling to me or to you, through our intuition, his agony at the situation, and saying forthrightly, "I am going to make this all right. It is my determination to make this all right. I want you to help me make it all right."

So too in the resurrection of Jesus is God's nod to us that God's love will not be defeated or destroyed. God is nodding, is beckoning to us in the resurrection of Jesus and saying, 'I will not surrender you or give you up to the destructive forces within this world. Your lives are immersed in my love that raises even the dead.' Just as betrayal and death sought to seal the end of Jesus, so our weariness and helplessness over the world's pain needs God's resurrecting love in us.

Apostle Peter records the resurrection story this way; 'We are witnesses to all that he did both in Judea and in Jerusalem. They put him to death by hanging him on a tree; but God raised him on the third day and allowed him to appear, not to all the people but to us who were chosen by God as witnesses, and who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. Acts 10:34ff.

The first witnesses did not balk at retelling the tragic events of the betrayal of Jesus, the desertion by friends and the terrible crucifixion of Jesus. Just as it was then and it is today, Jesus' Resurrection is God's invitation to us to witness a Love that rises in the midst of darkness - forgiveness even after betrayal, a future even when all seemed lost.

The play "The Laramie Project", is based on interviews in the community of Laramie Wyoming. In 1998, Matt Shepherd, a young university student was brutally murdered because he was gay. The play is the unfolding accounts from interviews with residents, acquaintances and even those who questioned or opposed his gay life. There were profound moments of awakening in the play, to the truth of Matt's death and the revelation to this conservative community of what lay beneath its surface. Finally, there is a powerful message of truth and hope by his father.

Matt's life became a catalyst for transforming the lives of those who were prepared to face the truth about themselves and the town. The truth that it had within it enough prejudice and hate to brutalise another.

The local priest from Laramie, who held a vigil for Matt, comments on the need to face the truth. He says about the two young men facing the death sentence;

FATHER ROGER: I think right now our most important teachers must be Russell Henderson and Aaron McKinney. They have to be our teachers. How did you learn? What did we as a society do to teach you that? See I don't know if many people will let them be their teacher. I think it would be wonderful if the judge said: in addition to your sentence: you must tell your story, you must tell your story.

Resurrection happens when truth gives birth to hope and healing. The truth - that while our lives are fragile and fearful, we have the potential for wounding others deeply. The truth about all of us, that while we often despair and struggle with the life that we have been dealt or chosen, we judge too quickly those that fail our expectations for them. Out of this honest appraisal at the cross, are we then in a place to receive the power of resurrection and the word of life.

It is to Mary Magdalene that the Easter truth first comes as personal encounter. She is the first person to become an apostle of the resurrection, a communicator of truth. By her life and words she carries the ministry of Risen Jesus to the community.

Mary carries the news that the life of Jesus is not destroyed by the oppressor, the betrayer, murderer or destroyer of beauty and tenderness— love is stronger than death. The Resurrection of Jesus creates within her the wings to carry hope and forgiveness to the world.

ANDY: Aaron McKinney was found guilty of felony murder, which meant that the jury could give him the death penalty. That evening, Judy and Dennis Shepard were approached by McKinney's defense team, who plead for their client's life. The following day, when the sentencing phase of the trial was set to begin, Dennis Shepard made a statement to the court. It reads;

DENNIS SHEPARD: My son Matthew did not look like a winner. He was rather uncoordinated and wore braces from the age of thirteen until the day he died. However, in his all too brief life he proved that he was a winner. On October 6, 1998 my son tried to show the world that he could win again. On October 12, 1998 my first born son and my hero, lost. On October 12, 1998 my first born son and my hero, died, fifty days before his twenty-second birthday.

I keep wondering the same thing that I did when I first saw him in the hospital. What would he have become. How could he have changed his piece of the world to make it better?

Matt officially died in a hospital in Ft. Collins, Colorado. He actually died on the outskirts of Laramie, tied to a fence. You Mr. McKinney with your friend Mr. Henderson left him out there by himself, but he wasn't alone. There were his lifelong friends with him, friends that he had grown up with. You're probably wondering who these friends were. First he had the beautiful night sky and the same stars and moon that we used to see through a telescope. Then he had the daylight and the sun to shine on him. And through it all he was breathing in the scent of pine trees from the snowy range. He heard the wind, the ever present Wyoming wind, for the last time. He had one more friend with him, he had God. And I feel better knowing he wasn't alone.

Matt's beating, hospitalization and funeral focused world wide attention on hate. Good is coming out of evil. People have said enough is enough. I miss my son, but I am proud to be able to say that he was my son.

Judy has been quoted as being against the death penalty. It has been stated that Matt was against the death penalty. Both of these statements are wrong. I too believe in the death penalty. I would like nothing better than to see you die Mr. McKinney. However this is the time to begin the healing process. To show mercy to someone who refused to show any mercy. Mr. McKinney, I am going to grant you life, as hard as it is for me to do so, because of Matthew. Every time you celebrate Christmas, a birthday, the Fourth of July remember that Matt isn't. Every time you wake up in your prison cell remember that you had the opportunity and the ability to stop your actions that night. You robbed me of something very precious and I will never forgive you for that. Mr. McKinney I give you life in the memory of one who no longer lives. May you have a long life and may you thank Matthew every day for it.

"To show mercy, to one who refused to show mercy." In David's words and life, resurrection takes place. He gives a murderer and a community, time for a new beginning. He gives himself, the space to love, hope and heal.

The resurrection of Jesus is God beckoning to us with a love that is stronger than the forces of death in world, and with a purpose that liberates us from our illusions and oppressions- from 'the things that are on earth' Paul says.. We are so quickly distracted and made captive to with that which is elusive, and that which keeps trying to hold off death, whether it is our love of 'makeovers', renovations or new distractions. Anxiety about our future crawls under the door of our security systems. God nods to us that resurrection alone is the certain ground of the future.

There was no doubt that the first message of resurrection declared by an angel and carried by women to Peter and the first disciples, came in a tidal wave of joy and peace. They were witnessing a love that was changing the face of religious, political and social life. We too share in that witness, as we allow the message and presence of resurrection to raise the dead within us, in love and for love.

But let us also consider that God is the witness also in this resurrection story. For God is looking at the world through this story, through the empty tomb, through the lives of frightened disciples; and God is nodding to us and saying ; 'I will not surrender you or give you up to the destructive forces within this world. Your life is immersed in my love that raises even the dead. Do not be afraid, share this message in the world that I have made.'

May the rising love of the Son transform us to be Love on this day and in this world.

Christ is Risen