

OPENING A DOOR TO WIND AND SUNLIGHT

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I opened the chapel door for morning eucharist on a sticky warm morning. The breeze cooled the gathering, disturbed the papers and books on pews, but also let the sunshine in. When we open doors the wind and the sunlight bring both blessing and disruption to our home. In a cyclone season people secure themselves from stormy dangers, but in the regular seasons of life we open doors for fresh air and warmth to permeate our homes.

When the disciples shut themselves up in a room after the crucifixion (*John 20:19*), Jesus entered their room to help them open the door to their world with news of resurrection. So too as life rises within us, insightful leadership will open doors to carry life to others.

Leadership as it opens doors to life must work with safe uncertainty - that is, good leadership ensures a place of safety with one another in our community in order to explore life giving possibilities in uncertain times.

Yet life is highly disruptive of our leadership plans. We are less able to respond to the uncontrollable than we imagined. So we may deal with our anxieties and fears by pursuing certainty in the face of challenges, when certainty about the future is unattainable. Or we may resign ourselves to having someone else be responsible for our happiness and want others to make

decisions for us. Or we may say to ourselves that a new leader will save us and a new program will deliver us out of our circumstances.

Good leadership however opens a way forward through challenges, not always knowing the resolution to them. Each of us can offer our leadership irrespective of our position when we seek to collaborate, attend with listening skills and nurture a co-operative spirit. Blocking change or subverting leadership may appear to have their reasons, but our leadership needs to be exercised with others in community for the common good.

Jesus once said to the disciples,

"You feed them," when faced with hungry thousands on a hill. And so a boy with his lunch steps forward for Jesus' blessing. The lad with the lunch felt safe enough among the disciples to step forward and offer what he had. While we may be worried about the demands of life we can create safe spaces for people to feel welcome and belong in our churches, where newcomers, young and older, stranger and leader are able to contribute.

Emotional and spiritual safety allows our community to have space for good conversations and to discuss options in uncertain times. What are the good practices for people to know they are safe to belong, to make suggestions, to contribute in our churches? Are people threatened by another's gift or can we have an open stance to possibilities yet to be explored?

So the invitation today comes to us not a hill with thousands to feed, but among our neighbours and friends who desire something more in life. Recently Bishop Andrew Curnow of Bendigo led the clergy of the Diocese on a process called Mission Action Planning. It wasn't a cure for decline or a recipe for solving problems, but he showed us some practices for each parish or ministry to make a way forward in being a people of resurrection and of good news in their community.



Can this be an open door for us? Why not ask your pastoral leader how you might work together on a mission action plan?

In the Pentecost season ahead, the leadership required in the church is likened to opening a door and inviting others to experience the breeze of the Spirit that washes in and sends us out. It is opening the door for sunlight to shine in our churches, so that we can truly see clearly and bear witness to the God who raises the "dead" in us and our neighbourhood. It is like setting the fire place in our churches for the Spirit to be ablaze that we might bear witness to love.

Sometimes the fireplace we set holds a fire that shines into the darkness of tragedy, illuminating suffering and bearing witness to love. Such leadership is self giving.

On February 1 2015 the Islamic State militant group released a video showing the killing of Japanese hostage Kenji Goto, who was kidnapped in Syria in October 2014. (The material below is adapted from Ian Paul, Associate Minister at St Nic's, Nottingham and Honorary Assistant Professor at the University of Nottingham).

Kenji Goto never liked to be described as a war correspondent although he often faced great danger, venturing into war zones that other reporters refused to enter. He did so to report not on the fighting, but on those who were vulnerable and suffering, particularly children. What is not known is that Kenji became a Christian in 1996 and his faith shaped his life and approach to the people he lived among.

Henry Tricks, a reporter for *The Economist*, knew Goto when he was based in Tokyo wrote; "It is hard to reconcile the soft-spoken, gentle man, who once paled in a bowling alley because the sound of the balls reminded him of bombs dropping on Iraq, with the image of a hardened war correspondent. But he covers wars with a difference. Instead of focusing on who is winning or losing, he tells the stories of ordinary people, especially children, who are forced to endure conflict and the horrors surrounding them. It is their resilience that inspires him, he says. When you ask how he reaches the dangerous places he reports from, he says he follows the footsteps of normal people getting on with their lives. They show him the way."

Kenji Goto's faith led him to document the suffering of the people of Syria and to motivate the wider world to support them. Goto was particularly motivated by the plight of a fellow Japanese Haruna Yukawa. Yukawa appeared to be a troubled loner, who wanted to set up business as a military contractor, but was clearly out of his depth.

"He was hapless and didn't know what he was doing. He needed someone with experience to help him," Goto, 47, told Reuters in Tokyo in August.

When Yukawa was abducted, Goto felt obliged to do what he could to get him out of trouble. He thought that he would be treated differently from Western correspondents, in the light of Japan's pacifist commitment which meant they had stayed out of the military conflict.

"I need to go there at least once and see my fixers and ask them what the current situation is. I need to talk to them face

to face. I think that's necessary," Goto said, referring to locals who work freelance for foreign correspondents, setting up meetings and helping with the language. This decision led him into captivity. ISIS released a video of both of them kneeling side by side.

"I have seen horrible places and have risked my life, but I know that somehow God will always save me," he said in May 2014 Japanese publication *Christian Today*.

Kenji opened the door on the plight of Syria's children. He bore witness to a faith which is transfigured by laying down one's life for another. (We remember acutely this month such leadership in the horror of war as we commemorate the centenary of the Gallipoli campaign.) When harm and hurt takes place it is hard to know how to respond – as a community we may bear witness to the suffering that others have borne by standing with them and to the mercy of Christ by the love we show to both victim and offender. Kenji Goto's life bears witness to leadership that gave loving presence in hard places.

In this season of Holy Week and Easter we follow the way of our pioneer Jesus Christ who has opened up for us a way into the Father's heart by love (*Hebrews 10:19-22*). The leadership of Christ has made a way for us to do what we could not do for ourselves. As we walk this way of Christ we move in the path of God's certain love and care, but we walk not yet knowing how God's love works out in our lives. Christ's leadership provides an example for us to follow, helping to open doors to the possibilities for justice, love and resurrection in our community.

May Easter bring sunlight and the Spirit for our families and friends, and open us up to the possibilities through loving leadership.

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