

Sermon for the Seventeenth Sunday after Pentecost. 1 October 2017

True or false ...

On this weekend there are some significant sporting fixtures being played. True. Not that everyone around Australia is paying attention.

The most important one is still to come, this afternoon. True for some but maybe not for everyone. Go the cowboys 😊😏 See. I am becoming a Queenslander!

Today is a 24 hour day. Again, that is true for some but not for others. Here in QLD the clocks didn't move in the night – except for those who rolled over and knocked them off the bedside table. In some other parts of Australia today is only 23 hours long. Bit don't worry. They get the extra hour back on April Fools day next year. I kid you not!

All Australian's are decent and fair people. True for some but there are some around us who sometimes seem to act in ways which would suggest otherwise.

Where we are at the moment is the best place to be. I hope most of us will say true! It is where we are so we had better make the best of it!

When we talk about things being true there will be some things that are partly true or true for some of us and not for others. There might also be many things which are true and yet some are more important than others, and some truths can and do and should have more impact on our living.

What about you? What is most true about you? What defines who you truly are? What shapes your values and your speaking and your actions? What are the things that shape how you see yourself?

In recognition of the sporting events, is it your football team? Does that connection shape you and define how you act and interact with others? In some families and some parts of our community that IS the dominating feature of some people. It defines who they will talk to, associate with and how they treat people wearing different sets of colours.

Is your defining truth geographical? Does it depend on your state of origin, or where you live now? Is it your nationality? Is it your skin colour? Is it the language you speak most fluently? Is it your sexual orientation? Is it your gender? What defines you? What is most true about you in ways which shape how you see yourself and how you think and speak and act?

Digging deeper, what is most true about you as a person? Is it your formed character? Is it your honesty and faithfulness? Is it a determination to do what is right? In the Gospel reading we heard today (Matthew 21:23-32) Jesus had high praise for the son of the vineyard owner who did what was right, not the one who just spoke the right words. Actions trump words. Is that what is most true about you, that you are a faithful person who actually seeks to do what is right?

The people who Jesus was confronting were some religious leaders who had all the words right but who were fudging on carrying that through into good, just, merciful, faithful, generous actions. At the same time Jesus, as he went around the streets, was meeting up with people who might have looked like they were not paying attention to the invitation from God to live deeply and in the best way. But Jesus knew that these people were actually on the ball, they had discovered a truth which they were letting seep into their living. So, Jesus said to the self-righteous, "Truly I tell you, the tax-collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you."

You can see why people got upset with Jesus when he said things like that. But he did and he needed to. To rattle people. To get them to think seriously about the way they were living, not just what they were saying.

What about us as a nation? What is most true about us. We are diverse and multicultural. We are prosperous and stable. The vast majority of Australians are in the top 10% of the most materially blessed people on our planet. We are richly blessed. Is that what is most true about us? Is that what defines us? Or is it something deeper? What is our national character?

William Deane, a former Governor General, said (on his last day as GG) “the ultimate test of our worth as a nation is how we treat the most vulnerable and disadvantaged of our people.” How do we treat the most vulnerable and disadvantaged? I wonder sometimes.

William Deane did say ‘of our people’ but it is clear from the leadership he gave in many areas of our life that ‘our people’ didn’t just mean those who are already citizens. It also extended to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged in the world around us. Is what is most true about us as a nation that we put into action compassion and open hearted welcome, the sort of welcome included in the rarely sung second verse of our national anthem? “For those who've come across the seas We've boundless plains to share.” Or is there a glitch between what we say and sing, and our actions?

This is not an invitation to beat ourselves up, as a nation or as individuals, for our failures. With that realisation of mistakes and dissonance between word and action comes an opportunity to do something about it, to live a truer self.

This is an invitation to discover another truth which gives us the invitation and the content to apply to do that reappraisal of what is most true about who we are and who we are called to be.

I found this quote this week from Brother Geoffrey Tristram, a member of an Anglican religious order. He said “The truest thing about us is not our sins, not the mistakes we have made, not the pain we have caused others. The truest thing about you and me is that we are God’s beloved children, fearfully and wonderfully made in God’s image - and created for Life and Love.”

The truest thing about us is that we are loved. By God. That is what is there at the centre of us, a solid piece of truth on which to be able to rely. A rock on which to build. Yet more like a spring of water than a rock, because it is something which flows into us and through us.

Do you know that the truest thing about you is that you are loved? In a very short time Fraser and Maggie will be baptised. Why do we do this? We do it because first of all they are loved, deeply, passionately, endlessly by God who wants them to grow to be people who will not only speak love but live it, who will not only know love but show love.

In the early part of our very long second reading today, from the second letter of Paul to the Christian community in Philippi, there was a statement which we can see as a declaration of the truest thing about Jesus. Jesus emptied himself. For love. For us. He didn’t cling to the power and authority and influence he had because of who he is, but came alongside us. Jesus lived and immersed himself in human life. He modelled compassion and generous giving and deep care for those around him as ways to live authentically.

As Fraser and Maggie grow and as they come to understand the intimate connection which we are celebrating for them today, may they know who to turn to as an example of how to be the truest self they can be. Learning from and being inspired by love, seen here. The same goes for all of us, which is why we are here. And that, my friends, is true.

Amen.