

Sixth Sunday of Easter. May 6, 2018. Living in love

Where do you want to live?

I think living here in Toowoomba is a good place to be. But that is about geography. And climate. What about where we live? How big should a house be? Enough rooms to have space for everyone. Enough entertaining spaces for friends and family to gather. Enough space for garden and whatever else we want to have in our outside space. Is that where we want to live?

That may all sound great, though we may all also have our own tweaks to the list of essentials for the space in which we live. Some want more garden. Some none. Some want space for people to come and visit. Some may be quite happy to say there is no room for visitors to stay over. Then there is the bar, or swimming pool, or home cinema, or gym, or pool room. Without a 'pool room' where would things 'go straight to'? Those who know that classic Australian movie 'The Castle' know what I mean!

When we consider where we want to live, is that the pattern we work through? Geography and climate and structure and physical space? Those things can all be great, but I want to suggest that without something else which defines the place where we live even the most comfortable, luxurious, well situated, excellently appointed house will not be a great place to live.

There is an old-fashioned word which appears in the gospel reading today (John 15:9-17). Abide. Jesus encourages people to abide. On one level it just means to stay, to keep going, to keep doing something which we have already begun to do. It is a rich word though because it also has the sense of finding a place to BE. Abode is another old-fashioned word. An abode is a house, a home, a dwelling, where we live. In English abode and abide are just one vowel apart but their meaning is also very close. Abiding is about finding the best abode, finding the best place to stay, to rest, to be inspired, to be nourished, ... finding the best place to LIVE.

Just before the passage from John 15 that we read here are other words from Jesus which are often read at funerals, Jesus saying that there is a house with many rooms prepared for us, a space which is big enough for us all. On one level it is about heaven being open-ended. On another level Jesus is talking about the open arms and hospitality of God where we are welcome. Always.

Here Jesus does say abide with him though. He isn't saying come and live with him, at least not directly. Jesus invited and encouraged us to abide, to live, to find a home and purpose and life in his love. Where are we being invited to live? It is in love.

That is the vital ingredient. If we have everything material we might think we need, if we have everything set up so that we have all the comforts and space we might think are necessary, but we do not have love, then we have nothing. As Paul wrote so beautifully to the Christians in Corinth in a passage often used at weddings (1 Corinthians 12). A dwelling or house or home without love is a hollow place. And a connection with love doesn't need to be in any particular place to be fulfilling.

The sort of love matters though. Love, as modelled in the way Jesus presented it, is a generous self-giving. It is about caring deeply about the other because of who they are, not because of what they might give us. Love which is a place and way of being in which to live is something which gives life. I don't think we can ever say that too often or too much. Life is found in love, expressed most eloquently and beautifully and with such inspiration in what we see in Jesus.

Just in case that seems a bit soft, don't forget where that love took Jesus and where it has taken those who have lived that love across the past 2000 years.

When I think of living in love, lives immersed and infused and inspired in love, there are many people who come to mind. There is also a particular place.

At the end of 1985 I went to India and spent two weeks in and around Madras, as it was then. Madras is now Chennai. I had the opportunity to visit one of the homes run by the Missionaries of Charity, the group founded by Mother Theresa of Calcutta. I also went to a place called the 'House of Love'.

In Tamil the name of the place is 'Anbu Illam', which means House of Love. It was founded by the Don Bosco organisation which has worked with children around the world. The House of Love in Chennai was only established in 1985 and so I got to see it as it was just starting out. When I was checking the spelling of the name it was wonderful to see that it is still operating nearly 33 years later!

When I visited I got to meet some of the children who lived there. They were rag pickers. We have homeless people in Australia. We have thousands of homeless children too across our country. In Madras as it was at that time it was estimated that there were thousands and thousands of homeless children, even in the one city. Children are particularly vulnerable on the streets. They are vulnerable to violence and abuse and exploitation. They are vulnerable to disease. Life is particularly hard and fragile and easily totally destroyed.

The House of Love provided these children with one safe place. As rag pickers they earned money by collecting rubbish which could be recycled. In particular they collected rags from the streets and these were sold for a few coins which allowed them to have at least some food. On the street, any possessions were hidden but could easily be found and stolen. On the street, any place they tried to sleep could be discovered and horrible things could and did happen to them.

In the House of Love they had a safe place to sleep, a locker where they could store a few things which were their own, the opportunity for a meal, the opportunity for some basic health care, and they had love. That love was expressed in all those practical ways as well as through valuing and honouring them for who they were. There were no resources to suddenly take all of those children off the streets. But what could be done was being done. They had a home. They were living in love, immersed in love, supported and strengthened by love.

Where do you want to live?

I want to live in a place, in relationships, in community in that sort of love. A nice location, pleasant geography, a decent level of comfort and space will be good, but without love, inspired love, generous love, caring love ... love as we meet love here ... those other things wont matter.

Where do you want to live?

I want to live in love, in love inspired by Jesus, and to be someone who invites others to do the same.

Amen

Paul Mitchell