

On Tuesday we observe ANZAC Day. A day which for many is a most sacred day in their calendar. At shrines, memorials and monuments in every town and city across Australia and New Zealand people gather to remember and honour the fallen, and to salute and express gratitude to those who survived.

Last year I was reading the book "Captains of the Soul: A History of Australian Army Chaplains." And I came across this account by Ernest Gordon, a Scottish officer and POW. The account recalls an extraordinary spiritual revival that accrued in the death camps on the River Kwai in Thailand, and provided a revealing portrait of Second AIF soldiers' desire for sincerity in religious belief:

This is his account

An Australian sergeant dropped in one evening...he had been talking things over with his coppers. Most of them, he told me, had called themselves Christians. But they had been so shaken by their experience that they were wondering if there might not be something in Christianity that they had failed to understand. Now they wanted to give it another whirl. The sergeant was emphatic about one thing. His lads wouldn't stand for any "Sunday school stuff". They wanted "the real dingo" .... I faced the group next evening in the bamboo grove. I was dismayed to find that there were several dozen of them... at each successive meeting the number grew...Through our readings (of the Bible) and discussions we gradually came to know Jesus. He was one of us. He would understand our problem, because they were the kind of problems he had faced himself. Like us, he often had no place to lay his head, no food for his belly, no friends in high places. He, too, had known bone-weariness from too much toil; the suffering, the rejection, the disappointment that make up the fabric of life. Yet he was no kill-joy...He was a working-man, yet one who was perfectly free, who had not been enslaved by economics, law, politics or religion... In the light of our new understanding, the Crucifixion was seen as being completely relevant to our situation. A God who remained indifferent to the suffering of His creatures was not a God whom we could accept. The Crucifixion, however, told us that God was in our midst, suffering with us.

What a remarkable account of spiritual revival. This is a side of the war that we hear little about. In the account, we heard of hundreds who professed a new-found faith in Christ.

This brings me to today's Gospel. Where we encounter the disciples hiding. They are hiding from fear of the Jews. And perhaps also hiding from God like Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden.

What was the last thing the disciples did before the arrest of Jesus? They fled and denied knowing Jesus, even though each of them had said they would be willing to die for him.

But they are not willing. They are hiding and they are terrified. Despite seeing the empty tomb and Mary Magdalene announcing, "I have seen the Lord." The disciples hid that same evening!

The disciples are gathered in a house and the doors are locked with fear. The house has become their tomb, and they have shut their eyes to the reality that life is now different.

It is into this context that the risen Christ appears to the disciples. And the first thing he says to them is not "where were you?" or "you abandoned me." He simply says "peace be with."

Here Jesus is giving his disciples the confident assurance that despite the circumstances, there is no need for fear, now or in the future. The peace of Jesus assures them of Jesus' presence and support, pleasing them with the knowledge that the Jesus they know and love is indeed one with God.

Then a second time Jesus says "peace be with you" and he goes on to say "as the Father sent me so I send you." Then he breaths on them and said, "receive the Holy Spirit."

This act of breathing on the disciples recalls the creative breath of God bringing life into being in Genesis chapter 2, and new life to the valley of dry bones in Ezekiel chapter 37.

So, Jesus the one who was dead, breathes life, the Holy Spirit into the fearful disciples. This restoring life of God is breathed out through Jesus, making new people of the disciples, and through them, offering this new life to the world.

I believe that this is what those men experienced in Ernest Gordon's account, despite being so shaken by their experiences, and being locked up in the death camps.

Jesus came and meet them in their need. Through their readings and discussions of the bible, they experienced the peace of Christ, the breath of Christ. That restored God's life giving Spirit within their heart, making new people out of them, and bring them to a new-found faith in Christ and live out a Christian ethic of self-sacrificial love.

I wonder, one week after Easter, is our life different? Where are we living? In the freedom and joy of the resurrection or behind locked doors like the disciples. How is our life different after Easter? And if it isn't what are the locked doors of our life, our heart, our mind.

I believe what John is speaking about in today's Gospel when he describes the house, the door, and the locks, are about more than a physical house. He is describing the interior condition of the disciples.

For the locked places of our lives are always more about what is going on inside of us than around us.

So, what are the closed places of our lives? Maybe like the disciples it is fear. Perhaps it is sorrow and loss. Maybe there are wounds that are so deep it does not seem worth the risk to step outside. Maybe its anger and resentment, or unable and unwilling to open up to new ideas, possibilities, and change.

Whatever these locked places in our lives are Jesus is always entering them. He comes unexpected, uninvited and sometimes even unwanted.

Christ comes and stands among us, he steps into our lives, our hearts, our minds, and offers us his peace, and breathes new life into us. Giving us all that we need so that we can open our heart and mind to a new life, a new creation, a new way for being. So that we to like the disciples can offer this new life, which is the living hope of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, to the world and to our community.

Let us pray

Living God,  
for whom no door is closed,  
no heart is locked,  
draw us beyond our doubts,  
till we see your Christ  
and touch his wounds  
where they bleed in others. Amen