

## Talk and Readings for Easter 2B 7<sup>th</sup> April 2024

Thinking of favourite verses in the Bible, I think that some of today's readings should be removed. Especially (readings in full listed at the end) the one about the oil in Aaron's beard and flowing onto his clothes. But the Acts passage is extremely challenging. Maybe it should be taken out of the Bible as being too challenging. :)

I'm reading about James Harrison who was an early settler of Melbourne when it was a few hundred people and then Geelong when it was the same. Even though he was only a printer and an amateur inventor he went on to invent the refrigeration cycle process that we know today in our fridges, freezers and air conditioners. This revolutionised life in Australia as it made the export of meat possible in the mid-1800's instead of just the tallow, wool or hides.

What is amazing in the first 33 pages, as I'm a slow reader, is that the biographer doesn't mention the original inhabitants which were displaced and then decimated by disease, starvation and murder.

There was a devout Methodist, William Thomas, who was an Assistant Protector to the Aboriginal people in the new settlement of Melbourne. He lived among the Boonwurrung people, who are the traditional custodians of the land in what is now South Melbourne. In February of 1840, he made this observation in his diary:

**“** *They are generous amongst themselves. Those who are fortunate through the day will distribute amongst those who are unsuccessful. Those who are ill are not expected to tramp the bush for food. If children are left orphans those children [are]... supported among them... They live in the greatest harmony amongst themselves.*

Quoted from Yalukit Willam: The River People of Port Phillip by Meyer

Eidelson (City of Port Phillip: 2015) p 80. The Yalukit Willam are one of six groups that together form the Boonwurrung people.

**“** *Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common... There was not a needy person among them, for as many owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need. (Acts 4:32-35)*

I think of Acacia Rose calling for a different economy in Ernie Dingo's *Going Places*

Essene movement in Jesus' time challenged the religious structures and economic dependencies of the first century Israel.

Such a movement was already in itself a challenge to the intricate systems of power and dependency of the day, in which your survival depended on belonging to a larger circle of people dependent on richer and more powerful people for work, who in their own interests helped keep you alive and well. There was no welfare safety net, apart from the generosity to the poor which some synagogue groups fostered. Stability was essential for survival. Extended families ensured the right matches in marriage with an eye to keeping what little land was possessed in the family and providing offspring for future support of those who survived into age. Jesus, himself, a firstborn son, normally expected to take the lead in ensuring family stability, had abandoned it. And now he had called others to do so. This was a kind of protest against the dominant regime. It went along with a proclamation which declared God's goodness reached out to all, the good and the bad, and on the basis of love and community promised good news for the poor.

In the Acts passage about the early church having an alternative economic relationship. They had learned that sharing resources was the only way to survive. Ideal as the scene may be as Luke imagines it, it captures fundamental values of the movement which have (or should have) informed it ever since. There can never be justification for privileging some above others. There can

never be a departure in word or deed from being good news for the poor. There can never be satisfaction with surrendering to systems which keep some poor and make others rich. To our own day we struggle with the issues. We affirm the huge advances which modern understandings of the state have brought: care at so many levels which in those ancient cultures was unimaginable, human rights, aid of many kinds. We also face constant pressures to protect the vulnerable from solutions to complex economies which impose the costs unevenly on the more vulnerable.

But to join the team of those who abandoned what security there was in the local economic system was to expose oneself to vulnerability.

Jesus declared God's generosity towards all in word and action. This was something welcomed by the socially outcast and resented by those who saw no need for such radicality. Declaring that this was what God's rule looks like could not help but be political in the sense of calling the systems of his day into question. That meant not just the tight dependencies of the economic system, but also the rule of those who steered and profited from them. It would not have been unexpected that Pilate sought to put a stop to the movement by executing its leader. That is standard practice in totalitarian regimes and even Rome's more civilised judicial system could resolve that the lesser evil was to execute than to allow unrest to fester, leading potentially to much greater ills.

Compassion and social justice, embracing the good news and its implications, have to mean having flexibility to respond to new situations in new ways. Paul was one of the best at thinking deeply on such issues. As a strategy he decided that part time work was a sensible way of continuing his ministry, rather than always being dependent on congregations for support.

An economy based on care of the world

Questions such as these all feel very hard! And they are hard, because they go against the dominant culture. The powers scream day and night that money is the ultimate value; that holding onto it provides safety, security and comfort; that we can control our lives and our futures through our savings and investments; that the poor are poor because of their poor choices; and so on.

I don't know how to bring about God's economy in this place; I don't know where the spirit is leading us. I can only offer the precedents of other economies, seen in the witness of the early church and in the traditional ways of the Boonwurrung people, economies in which no child is left hungry and all people's

needs are met. And then I will wait, and wonder, and pray. For these are all steps towards finding a way.

1 Pat 36

Dear Friends Another month has bitten the dust. Time is flying! Hope you can step off the treadmill of existence and experience JOY Faithfully Pat C

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### **Psalm 133**

How very good and pleasant it is when kindred live together in unity!

It is like the precious oil on the head, running down upon the beard, on the beard of Aaron, running down over the collar of his robes.

It is like the dew of Hermon, which falls on the mountains of Zion. For there the Lord ordained his blessing, life forevermore.

### **Acts 4:32–35 Laughing Bird Translation**

Now the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul, and no one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold. They laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.

### **1 John 1:1—2:2**

We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life— this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us— we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. We are writing these things so that our joy may be complete.

This is the message we have heard from him and proclaim to you, that God is light and in him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with him while we are walking in darkness, we lie and do not do what is true; but if we walk in the light as he himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous; and he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

### **Acts 4: 32-35 CEV**

There was an extraordinary harmony in the group of those who had put their trust in Christ. They shared a common heart and a common spirit. They also shared their possessions, giving up claims of private ownership and holding everything in common. With electrifying effect, the apostles shared the stories of their experience of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The evidence of God's generous love and mercy was apparent in all they did. No one among them was left battling to make ends meet, because those who owned houses and land sold up and handed over the proceeds to the apostles, with no strings attached, and the money was distributed to each person according to their needs.

### **John 20:19-31**

When it was evening on that day, the first day of the week, and the doors of the house where the disciples had met were locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After he said this, he showed them his hands and his side. Then the disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." When he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven them; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained."

But Thomas (who was called the Twin), one of the twelve, was not with them when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord." But he said to them, "Unless I see the mark of the nails in his hands, and put my finger in the mark of the nails and my hand in his side, I will not believe."

A week later his disciples were again in the house, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were shut, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side. Do not doubt but believe." Thomas answered him, "My Lord and my God!" Jesus said to him, "Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.