

**St Mary Magdalene's Anglican Church**  
**Moore Street, Adelaide**

**Reflection for the 6th Sunday of Easter**

I flew to Melbourne for a meeting in mid February. The corona virus was flourishing in Wuhan, China. I was a bit nervous, and took a small bottle of sanitiser with me for the flight. No one else seemed to be much bothered on the plane, and it was all ok.

When I got back, I had a phone call from my nephew who, in my opinion, spends far too much time surfing the net and getting over anxious about what he finds. He rang to warn me to be careful because of the corona virus. It would be become a pandemic like the Spanish flu he said. I tried to soothe his anxieties ... not quite like that, I said. Aunty, he said, It's going to be like the Rapture. At that time, I thought my nephew needed to get a grip of himself. I assured him I'd be fine, and so would he.

Now the Rapture, for those of you unfamiliar with this term, refers to the End Times, when the peoples of the world will be gathered together in the air to meet Jesus Christ. There are those who believe that this rapture will precede the coming of Christ and the Day of Judgment, and those who believe that the two events will be at the same time, in fact a single event. Anglicans hold with the latter idea of the single event, though who knows when or where?

Well, a month down the track, in mid to late March, Covid-19 was wreaking havoc through the wider world, not just China ... very certainly threatening us in Australia. In the stressful weeks since then, I wonder if there have been a few of us who have woken up in the morning, and felt a relief that we were still ok and alive. And yet, we may have had to deal with those feelings of disease ... as though the earth has moved under us. What on earth will happen next? It has not been quite the rapture my nephew alluded to ... but he was certainly closer to the truth in February than I was. At times Covid-19 seems to threaten our very existence. And maybe we have wondered what God has been doing in all this. Where is he?

Sitting on his hands as the world around us has crumbled?

In many ways, I think we may be sharing something of what the disciples experienced when Jesus told them, that he would leave them, to return to the Father ... they would see him no more. Their hopes and dreams would be shattered, the world as they had come to know it was being taken from them. They felt bereft.

And Jesus says to them, "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also will live."

Apparently there is a whole new lingo that has sprung up around Covid-19. As I describe some of my feelings these last weeks, you might think that I am "Coronalusional", ie. I have a distorted reality, caused by anxiety or too much time spent in lockdown.

You too may wonder if we are living in the "coronapocalypse" ... ie. living a life which will never return to normal, or worse, the human species will be wiped out by a mutating virus. Well who knows, but the rapture hasn't come ... yet. But we may well be sharing the feeling the disciples had at the imminent departure of Jesus ... a feeling of being left alone, in a world left to cope as best it may.

The words of Jesus speak to us today. "I will not leave you orphaned; I am coming to you. In a little while the world will no longer see me, but you will see me; because I live, you also

will live.” Jesus does come to us, today, either in the rapture, but more likely for the present, experienced as his Spirit.

Intellectually we know that Jesus’s spirit lives with us; we believe that in faith. But for myself, I also have to live with the doubt of whether he is with us ... faith and doubt going together, as they so often do, for me at least.

But Jesus says more than that to us in this passage. He says, “On that day you will know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you.” But what does Jesus mean when he says, “I am in my Father and you in me and I in you.” We hear Jesus say this type of saying a few times, in John’s gospel. For example John records Jesus saying in Chapter 17, “The glory that you have given me I have given them, so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become completely one.”

These sayings can become mesmerising and we glide over the familiarity of them. But what does it mean to us ... especially in these days we are living in?

For the past two months I have been reading Ruth Burrows, that Carmelite nun, spiritual writer, some of whose work I shared with you earlier this year.

Ruth Burrows writes, that some of us think that we can come to the Father directly, that we no longer need Jesus. But, she says, “We are failing to see the import of Jesus’ words, that “to see him is to see the Father, that to know him is to know the Father, that to be in him is to be in the Father.” But Jesus also says, “No one can come to the Father but by me,”. Now this is not in the sense that you use me to get to him and when you have got to him, you don't need me anymore ... that you have simply no contact with the Father except through me in time and in eternity. Not at all. In fact this is direct contact ... Jesus’ communication is “pure God” and only his communication is “pure God.” What we call the mystical, a direct, unmediated contact with God, is Jesus. He is his living touch. We have this direct contact only in him ... in fact, we are becoming Jesus ... we are becoming Jesus.

And further, Ruth Burrows says,

*“The mystical life is beyond our power, nothing we can do can bring us to it, but God is longing to give it to us, to all of us, not to a select few. He has made us for this, to share his divinity, to become his sons and daughters in very truth, with all that this implies. The prerequisite on our part is an acceptance of poverty, of need, of helplessness; the deep awareness that we need Jesus our saviour who alone brings God and man together, who is our holiness ... We are eager to stress that the mystical is of the essence of Christianity, not the privileged way of the few. To be more precise: it means being wholly possessed by God.”*

As I read these quotes to you from Ruth Burrows, I am very aware how dense her text is ... how far she pushes the envelope in our understanding of what Jesus is saying in our gospel reading today. Therefore, I do suggest that you take the time to read the text of her quotes and think about them to get to a deeper understanding of what she is saying ... a greater perception of what Jesus is offering each of us in our pandemic world, so we may not feel alone ... we may instead know that we are being offered the life of being at one with Father, in Jesus Christ.

At the end of the text of this homily I have put Ruth Burrow’s quotes in full so you may further ponder them at your leisure. I hope they will help to explain what Jesus is saying to us about how he is with us always. I hope they may be of some strength to us all as we experience such existential disruptions to our very selves.

Ruth Burrow's quotes in full:

*"Many of us have the secret notion that we are working to get to a "pure" prayer where "God" is experienced directly, where we no longer need Jesus. We are failing to see the import of Jesus' words that to see him is to see the Father, that to know him is to know the Father, that to be in him is to be in the Father and that we have no direct link with the Father, if by "direct" we mean other than through Jesus. We want to think we have but we have not. "No one can come to the Father but by me," and this, not in the sense that you use me to get to him and when you have got to him you don't need me anymore, but you have simply no contact with the Father except through me in time and in eternity. But of course, this is direct contact. Jesus' communication is "pure God" and only his communication is "pure God." What we call the mystical, a direct, unmediated contact with God, is Jesus. He is his living touch. We have this direct contact only in him ... [H]is life is secretly, escaping our consciousness, substituting itself for ours. We are becoming Jesus ..."*

And further, Ruth Burrows says,

*"The mystical life is beyond our power, nothing we can do can bring us to it, but God is longing to give it to us, to all of us, not to a select few. He made us for this, to share his divinity, to become his sons and daughters in very truth, with all that this implies. The prerequisite on our part is an acceptance of poverty, of need, of helplessness; the deep awareness that we need Jesus our savior who alone brings God and man together, who is our holiness ... We are eager to stress that the mystical is of the essence of Christianity, not the privileged way of the few. To be more precise: it means being wholly possessed by God.*

*Ruth Burrows: Essential Writings, Modern Spiritual Masters Series, ed. Michelle Jones*

Juliana SI