

**SERMON FOR THE DIOCESE OF BUNBURY: 7/4/2024: GEOFF
CHADWICK: SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER: JN 20:19-31:
“THE VICTIM RETURNS”**

Some years ago there was somewhat of a controversy in the press over an article that Archbishop Peter Carnley wrote on the resurrection published in The Bulletin. I found no objection in the article and I wondered what all the fuss was about. In the end Peter Carnley finally commented that “wasn’t it wonderful to have the press over the whole nation talking about the resurrection at Easter time!”

I quote to you a part of his article:

“The Easter good news is, of course, eternally the same. But there is a fundamental difference between those of us who hear the Easter proclamation today and those in Jerusalem who first heard the same message 2000 years ago. Those who initially heard, first the rumours and then the confidently proclaimed conviction that Jesus had been raised, were the very ones who had actually been involved in His death, either actively as judges and accusers, or passively as consenting bystanders. They were people with blood on their hands.

*The Apostle Peter, in an early Easter sermon recorded by Luke in Acts 4, said: “This Jesus whom you crucified God has raised from the dead.”
Their own victim was back!*

Even before the truth of that claim could be checked, it naturally sent a cold shiver down the spine of those who heard it: had He perhaps returned to get His own back, to seek revenge, or to turn the tables on those who sought to dispose of Him?

The Easter proclamation soon scotched any such fear: their very own victim was said to be inexplicably alive, back from the dead - but not as a ghost to haunt and torment them. His return from the grave was announced not with gravity but with gladness. It was announced as good news. The very one they had condemned was back, not vindictively to condemn them, or to seek revenge, but with the proffer of salvation. He was back in a generous and forgiving spirit that promised them life.

Just as Jesus had soaked up insult prior to His crucifixion and not lashed out at His critics, and just as He had turned the other cheek, steadfastly refusing to curse His accusers, so now, having suffered at their hands, the victim returns with the marks of His crucifixion wounds on His hands, but as He always was in terms of fundamental disposition: He offers forgiveness and life, precisely to those with blood on their hands. Such is the nature of the love we call divine.

That is the nub of the first Easter proclamation 2000 years ago. At Easter, the victim does not just re-appear. The resurrection is not just another nature

miracle that demonstrates what God can do with matter; it is not just a "conjuring trick with bones", as a former Bishop of Durham once so notoriously put it. Rather, Jesus re-appears as the bearer of salvation in the concrete form of acceptance and forgiveness, even for those who had wronged Him."

(Carnley, P., 2000, The Bulletin, April 25, 2000, Vol 118 No 6221, Sydney, p40)

I find this concept of the resurrection a really interesting one. Here, Carnley suggests that resurrection is known whenever a wronged victim returns to the accusers and offers "peace" in return.

Hear again from today's reading:

"... Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you." After 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..." (Jn 20:19-21, NRSV)

Could there be anything more appropriate that the first gift of the resurrected Jesus to his disciples other than peace? I think not. After political intrigue, after near arrest of them all, after execution, after sudden death, after the suicide of one of their number and after the possible disappearance of the body- what could be more needed than peace – divine peace? Carnley make the point even more clearly – the peace is given in place of what could have been retribution. Jesus does not accuse those who allowed his crucifixion – no – he returns to them with peace.

This peace, this forgiving peace, this peace of rejoicing is the first experience drawn from the resurrection. Perhaps this is one way in which we can experience resurrection today: whenever we find ourselves surrounded by a divine, forgiving,

joyous peace we are in the midst of resurrection. Such a peace restores and renews us. Such peace gives us hope. Such peace causes us to believe in life again.

It is not by chance that the middle of the Eucharist calls us to peace. In a little while we will repeat Jesus' word: "Peace be with you," we will say. Now although we can be a little blasè about this weekly ritual its significance should not be underestimated. Just as Jesus returned to his accusers with the greeting of peace it may be we have to do that. Just as those early disciples were terrified, confused, grieving, and lost; so we too can be terrified, confused, in grief or lost. A simple word of peace may be all we need to resurrect our hope in life again.

Again Peter Carnley says it quite well:

"It is when we are unexpectedly met and received with a welcoming smile in the face of the stranger whom secretly we tend to write off or diminish, or those who suffer as a consequence of our unwitting passive inactivity, that we know ourselves to be judged. But not at the same time condemned. Rather, when we are instantaneously forgiven, accepted, welcomed and received, we know the salvation of God, through the medium of our victim." (Carnley, P., 2000, The Bulletin, April 25, 2000, Vol 118 No 6221, Sydney, p43)

May we both know how to give and receive this form of resurrection life.

Peace be with you.