

## St Mary's Concord

### A Reflection for the Sixth Sunday of Easter

*The readings for the Sixth Sunday of Easter (Year A): Acts 8:5-8, 14-17; 1 Peter 3:15-18; John 14:15-21. The Gospel continues the instruction Jesus gives to the disciples at the Last Supper to prepare them for his coming death and resurrection. He tells them that he will ask the Father to send another Advocate, the Spirit of truth.*

*To contain the spread of the COVID-19 Pandemic all churches remain closed.*

In his novel *The Chosen* Chaim Potok, the Jewish American author and rabbi, tells the story of a young Jewish boy, Reuven Malter, growing up in New York in the 1940s. An accident in a baseball game leaves Reuven in hospital but more importantly, it sets in motion a series of events that have a profound impact on his life.

At one point Reuven says to his father, "It all started with a silly baseball game, I can't believe it." But his father wisely replies, "Reuven, as you grow older you will discover that the most important things in life that happen to you will often come as a result of silly things, as you call them. 'Ordinary things' is a better expression. That is the way the world is."

To see God in the ordinary things, the day to day events of life, that is the challenge. It is one thing to look back with hindsight and see the hand of God at work. We can all recall events in our lives that were very ordinary at the time. But the consequences that flowed from them had an important impact: the chance meeting with a particular person, a sudden illness, or just being in the right place at the right time.

It is not just the one event that was important. As we look back, we see that there was a pattern, a series of events. One choice led to another and we can sometimes be surprised, like Reuven, at the direction our life has taken. Was it just random chance?

For St Luke, the story of the *Acts of the Apostles* is the story of the Holy Spirit guiding the community of believers. Luke was writing with the benefit of hindsight, but he wanted his community to understand that this movement did not just happen by chance.

When the disciples in Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans had welcomed the message about Jesus that Philip had proclaimed, Peter and John were sent to Samaria. Luke tells us, that they laid their hands on them and the Samaritans received the Holy Spirit (Acts 8:17).

Luke was reflecting on a pattern that had emerged in the life of those first followers of *The Way*, as he called the Christian life. They first heard the word of God proclaimed to them. The Spirit was already present as they responded to the word and that gift of the Spirit was confirmed by the community. That was the significance of the ritual laying on of hands by Peter and John as leaders of the community.

It is by seeing our experience reflected in the wider community of believers that we begin to see the pattern emerging. It allows us to make sense of what at first may seem to be disconnected events.

The experience of the COVID-19 pandemic has confronted us with the challenge of seeing the ordinary events of life through a different lens. Social isolation for many in our society has been shaped by our access to modern means of communication. But it has been a different experience for people who do



not have computers or smart phones or have a disability that limits their access to the wider community.

Yet the first stage of the relaxation of the isolation has also reminded us that a connection through social media is not the same as human face to face contact. Our relationships need that contact and without it we can struggle to stay connected.

The challenge of how to stay connected in the face of absence was one of the key questions facing the writer of John's Gospel. How do we maintain our relationship with God without the physical presence of Jesus?

In last Sunday's reading (John 14:1-12) Jesus told the disciples that he would be leaving them and they would no longer experience his physical presence. He also promised that he would return to take them with him. But the question for the community was, how do we stay connected to Jesus while we are waiting for him to return?

The answer is through the gift of the Spirit, the Advocate that the Father will send. The word "advocate" translates a Greek word, *parakleto* (sometimes translated as *paraclete*) which originally referred to a legal assistant. But in the context of John's Gospel a better word would be "guide" or "comforter".

We stay connected with Jesus, the risen Lord, through the gift of the Spirit who is with us to guide us not just as individuals but as a community of believers. It is the Spirit who helps us to see the pattern emerging in the ordinary events of life.

What became important for the early Christians is also important for us. To live in union with the risen Christ is summed up in a central message of John's Gospel, "the one who has my commandments and keeps them is the one who loves me". To experience the abiding presence of God's love is the gift of the Spirit who transforms our lives so that we become for each other living expressions of God's love for us.

Over the next two Sundays as we celebrate the Ascension and Pentecost, we will continue to explore what the gift of the Spirit means for us.

*Paul Crowley*  
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