

Lyn Valley Mission Community

Epiphany (Year A)

Isa 9:1-4

1Corinthians 1:10-18

Matthew 4:12-33

In speaking and listening, may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen

Today is the Sunday of the week of prayer for Christian Unity.

The week of prayer for Christian Unity is actually an eight day period, now fixed from 18-25th January. This time of prayer has been marked for over a hundred years, dating back to 1908 and has as its inspiration Jesus' prayer for his followers during the Last supper, as recorded in John's gospel that "they may be one that the world may believe". It's a reminder that Jesus makes a clear connection between Christian unity and Christian Mission. Yet in recognising the need for the week of prayer for unity, we are acknowledging that through Christian history we can track a pattern of division even as the faith has spread. Our desire may be to be united by faith in Jesus, but the human reality of that can be a challenge.

Now each year the week has a theme (this year it is "do good, seek justice) and resources are developed from a different county to be used across the world. In the liturgy designed for this year there is a space for a few people to tell their own stories of faith and how it inspires their work for justice. In the liturgy these are introduced with the following words:

Let us hear some stories. As living stones, we are bearing witness to the stories that will live on. With each story, the Body of Christ is being built up and edified. Our stories are intertwined with the story of Christ, the Corner Stone of our Christian unity. As God has created us to be in communion, so too our stories are connected. Let us reflect as we hear these stories.

Telling our stories, and truly listening to the stories of others is profound.

In simple ways we do it all the time in daily life – the quick chat about what's been happening as we pass in the street, the phone call to catch up. These are ways we stay connected.

It is a familiar part of life, but if we give telling our own stories and listening to others' stories more time it offers great gifts.

Where differences arise very often the only way to reconciliation is to give time to hearing the full story of what each side has experienced. In the telling and the listening understanding and compassion have a chance to arise and transform the relationship.

Storytelling can lead us into unity.

I wonder if you can think of times when your own attitude to a situation has changed because you have heard another person's story about what was experienced?

Hearing the story of another person's life can also be a source of inspiration and curiosity which moves you to explore new things or to connect with new ways of being and doing you had not considered?

Can you think of people in your life who have inspired you by their life and the stories they tell?

Storytelling can lead us into new beliefs and new vision.

In Christian terms I think telling our stories is essential to both the unity of our faith communities and to their growth.

With all that in mind, my prayer for Christian unity is for the grace for all who share Christian faith to cherish and develop the love of sharing their own stories and listening well to the stories of others with the trust that all our stories are all intertwined with the story of Christ and in the telling his love is revealed.

Jesus' prayer for unity was in the upper room surrounded by those whose stories would be most closely entwined with his through following him from Galilee to Jerusalem, living through the agony of his crucifixion the next day, only to become the first witnesses of the resurrection and those who would become the leaders of the earliest church and those first entrusted to tell his story.

We meet the first of them in today's gospel:

Simon Peter and Andrew, along with James and John.

They were all fishermen in family businesses along the lake of Galilee.

In today's story we hear Jesus call them to follow him, honouring all that they bring as their own back story, by inviting them to become "fishers" of people.

For many who experience their own call from God, this story becomes entwined with their own – the call to move from one way of life to another in response to Jesus' presence and invitation. Sometimes it is through hearing the story that they recognise what is going on in their own hearts.

I wonder how you reacted to it today?

If you were here last week (or read last week's sermon) and are feeling alert, however, you might respond to today's gospel with a different question?

Didn't we hear about Andrew and Simon Peter's first meeting with Jesus as told by John last week, and it was a bit different? Andrew went to find out where Jesus was staying and he called his brother to meet him.

Perhaps it is a reminder to us that even the characters whose stories we think we know well in the Bible, those closest to Jesus, have a depth that goes beyond what we know or will ever know. Perhaps we might reflect on the combination of stories and begin to consider that today's story of the response to Jesus' call was a culmination of a longer time of them getting to know Jesus as well as Jesus' knowledge of them, a longer story that is not captured in the Bible.

Perhaps more like the longer story of coming to know God that many of us would say is our story.

And perhaps as they shared their story of knowing Jesus, Andrew and Simon Peter emphasised different parts of their meeting with Jesus with different people, or listeners focused on what spoke powerfully in their own hearts through the power of the Holy Spirit in speaking and listening.

Because I think it is the work of the Spirit to bring both reconciliation and inspiration, unity and faith, when words are spoken.

And just perhaps, it is through the gift of the Holy Spirit that we can find the courage to become story tellers of our own lives, listeners to the stories of others and to be those who create a compassionate space in life for sharing such conversations: so that we may be made one and the world may believe.

In speaking and listening may God be known, who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Amen

