

Sermon for Easter Day 2024
Christ Church Cathedral, Grafton
Dr Murray Harvey, Bishop of Grafton



Women going to the sepulchre, 1912, Robert Anning Bell.

A survey of children aged 4-8 years revealed what they think is the true meaning of love.

When someone loves you, the way they say your name is different. You know your name is safe in their mouth.

God could have said magic words to make the nails fall off the cross, but he didn't. That's love.

Love is when your puppy licks your face even after you left her alone all day.

Love is what's in the room with you at Christmas if you stop opening the presents and listen.¹

Children offer fresh yet insightful descriptions of love.

In our time, love is more important than ever. Episcopal Priest and former Dean of Sacramento Cathedral in the USA, Dean Brian Baker² says that, *the world is too dangerous and too beautiful for anything but love.*

Today we recall with John's Gospel the visit of Mary Magdalene to the tomb. Other Gospel writers have other women joining her, but whether alone or together this is a visit inspired by love and made in love.

The Greek *klaiō* (wept, weeping) used at verses 11, 13 and 15 reveals the depth of feeling, the depth of love and hence despair here (mourn, bewail, wail).

In the crucifixion of Jesus, the heart of Mary Magdalene was broken, as were the hearts of the other disciples. Many dreams were broken and their hearts were heavy. Yet love remained. They were sad, grieving and disillusioned.

Yet there was still *something* that could be done out of love. The anointing of his body for burial (Mark 16:1).

As we come here this morning perhaps our hearts too are heavy. Many of us will have entered into the events of Holy Week and perhaps we're still emerging from the emptiness of Good Friday and Easter Saturday.

Naturally at Easter we think also of the current suffering in the Holy Land and our hearts are rightly heavy because of that.

I was in Bendigo last week for the Australian Bishops meeting. We talked about our frustration that despite calls and action supporting a ceasefire there, the bombing continues and hostages continue in captivity. The debate was, should we write a letter or not? Will it make any difference. Thankfully we decided to write a statement calling for peace (see below).

Injustices and wars continue in Ukraine, Sudan, Congo, Afghanistan and many other places.

There is much grief and frustration about these conflicts. I don't know about you, but I often feel not only frustrated and helpless, but also angry that despite widespread calls and protests, this suffering continues unabated.

In our own country, the Closing the Gap report³ was released a few weeks ago, showing that little progress has been made in addressing the widespread disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians on many levels including education, health, housing and justice. How damning is this, for such a well resourced nation! Anger and frustration is my response.

On this Easter morning, maybe we can resonate in our day with Mary Magdalene's weeping that came of disappointment, grief and love.

German musician Jochen Klepper, in his *Song of Solace in the Evening*, wrote that the God of love envelopes us in our darkness:

*In every night that me envelopes,
have I been permitted, in your arms to fall,
and you, who thinks of nought but love,
grows over me, grows over all.*

In our despair, we place ourselves in the arms of the God *who thinks of nought but love*.

In our anger, grief and frustration Jesus ministers to us himself, as the prisoner of love.⁴

The women did the only thing they could do at that time to express their ongoing love in that desperate situation - they went to anoint the broken, lifeless body of their Lord. *The world is too dangerous and too beautiful for anything but love.*

We have no body to anoint, so what can we do?

We can write letters, like the Bishops did, lobbying MPs and other leaders

We can pray

We can rally, or join a support group, and listen to the stories of those who suffer. (As a Parish Priest in Brisbane Diocese we welcomed refugee families living in our area. It wasn't until one of them recounted their story of coming to Australia by boat, in the hands of a people smugglers, that I finally appreciated the danger and depth of human suffering endured by refugees and asylum seekers).

We can send money to reputable organisations that can make a difference in situations that concern us

Most importantly we can commit to a personal relationship with Jesus Christ who came to share our human life, with all its frustrations, disappointments and brokenness. Allow his love to surround you, envelop and embrace you. All the actions we can take will mean little if they're not done out of love for him.

The Cross is the ultimate gift of sacrificial love. In the Cross we see just how much we are loved. May we share this love of Christ, as our Canon Pastor said in her sermon last Sunday, by offering our lives in loving service.

After all, the love that Christ showed from the Cross finds its fulfilment not in what it keeps but in what it gives.

Notes

1. The Red Can. Anglican Youth Newsletter.
2. <https://www.deanbaker.org/>
3. Study Report - Closing the Gap review - Productivity Commission:
<https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/closing-the-gap-review/report>
4. Rowan Williams, *Silence and Honey Cakes*, p91.



Anglican Church
of Australia

Statement on Peace in the Holy Land

We, the Bishops of the Anglican Church of Australia, gathered at Bendigo on Thursday 21st March, 2024, unanimously affirm the following statement.

As we enter into Holy Week, we lament the suffering due to the ongoing war in the Holy Land.

In the spirit of Jesus Christ who said, “Blessed are the peacemakers” we pray for a just and lasting peace, for the release of all hostages, and for urgent aid to be delivered to civilians in Gaza.

In praying for peace in the Holy Land, we particularly pray for strength for our Christian brothers and sisters in Israel, Gaza and the West Bank who, under the shadow of war, prepare to commemorate the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Anglicans across Australia are already praying for peace in this time. We know that this prayer will be shared in every church this Holy Week and Easter.

As we lament the ongoing suffering, we condemn antisemitism and anti-Muslim sentiment which is on the rise in our own society.

We appeal to all Australians to treat others as they would like to be treated, and we commit ourselves to work with other faith leaders for the common good for all Australians.