

# Homily for people and parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2025, Epiphany 2

Readings: **Isaiah 62:1-5**

1Corinthians 12:1-11

**Psalms 36:5-10**

**John 2:1-11**

Nine days before Christmas there was a tragic car accident in Toowoomba. Five young people were in the car when it hit a pole. One young woman died at the scene of the accident, the driver has subsequently died, and the remaining three are in hospital with significant injuries. Bishop Daniel Abot asked if I would go with him to visit the family of the young woman who had died because these young people and their families are part of a Dinka speaking Anglican congregation, from the Australian South Sudanese community.

I withdrew from a video meeting at 7pm and went with Bishop Daniel, on a rainy night, to the family home. My guess is that there were more than thirty people in the house – caring for the family and attending to their needs. We shook hands, hugged and cried before sitting together. Father Peter Mayen – pastor for that congregation – made me welcome, introduced me to the people I didn't know, then invited me to share some words of comfort. What to say to a family that have violently lost a beloved daughter and sister? What to say to a grieving community for whom the world has become dark?

I said that I was sorry for their loss, and as the father of two girls struggled to imagine their grief. I spoke about God as shepherd with us, even in the valley of the shadow of death. I spoke about Jesus weeping when he heard about the loss of his friend Lazarus. I spoke about Jesus promising to be with us always, until the end of the age. Then I prayed, and we sat together in silence.

After some minutes Father Peter began gently to sing a hymn in Dinka, and one by one people joined in, and I hummed the melody thankful for the grace of that shared song. Fr Peter later told me that the words simply asked for the Holy Spirit to come.

There can be something incredibly rich about singing together – in the contexts of church and cathedral... in the context of someone's home... in so many places really!

Some years ago I went the Brisbane Entertainment Centre to watch the English folk band called Mumford and Sons. Their songs have thoughtful lyrics, lots of drums, and a consistently provocative banjo! During one of the songs that night the musicians stopped playing and I sang a cappella these lyrics, together with thirteen thousand other people:

*"...So, give me hope in the darkness that I will see the light*

*'Cause oh they gave me such a fright!*

*But I will hold on with all of my might, just promise me we'll be alright..."*

There is such longing in the song, and the experience reminded me of an essay I'd read which suggests that for many young people, music festivals and concerts are acts of worship in a non-theistic faith!

Certainly, music festivals like the Woodford folk festival, offer days of intensive community enhanced by music and dance. Different generations can be present and people camp and share things together. There can be face-painting, yoga sessions, circus skill classes, kite-flying and great vegetarian food. All this together with musical performances from gifted artists in which audience members can connect with each other through singing and dance.

Particular songs can express the hopes and fears of a generation, while the experience of being together can give a sense of hope and of being connected to others.

I wonder if being part of the Anglican Church has ever had some of these elements for you? Perhaps not the yoga sessions, circus skills, and kite flying – but, the experience of singing together with hope and of being connected to others.

The lyrics from that Mumford song certainly resonate with prayers that I have expressed over the years, both for myself and for others, *'...give me hope in the darkness that I will see the light... and, promise me we'll be alright...'*

In today's Psalm we hear something of the hope in God that the people of Israel had, and this was expressed in song – that's what a psalm is! I have heard these verses sung by Cathedral choirs over years in musical settings that have been inspiring but impossible to sing along with, and I wonder what Mumford and Sons would do with these lyrics. How would these verses sound if they were accompanied by driving drums, bass, guitar, piano, and banjo?

*"Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens,  
your faithfulness to the clouds.  
Your righteousness is like the mighty mountains,  
your judgements are like the great deep;  
you save humans and animals alike...  
For with you is the fountain of life; **in your light we see light.**"*

That last phrase is powerful, *'In your light we see light...'*. *'In your light (God) we see light...'* We see light – perhaps a glimpse, perhaps dazzling, but enough somehow to keep going.

With this reference to light we'd inevitably be reminded of the words of Jesus in John's Gospel (John 8:12) where he said, *"I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life..."* As people who have faith in Christ - what light does Christ bring to our darkness?

Whether it is a very personal experience of darkness – like the grief of losing your daughter in a car accident; the grief of someone you love dying from a disease; the grief for a parent diminished by dementia. Or, it could be a community experience of darkness – like youth crime, homelessness and domestic violence. Or, darkness that comes from global experience like wars which seem to be never ending; and wildfires that have destroyed entire neighbourhoods.

What light does Christ bring to these personal, communal, and global experiences of darkness?

I invite you to bring to your mind one area of darkness that burdens you – it could be personal, communal, or global. What light; what hope; what transformation do you long for Christ to bring to that reality?

Please think about this for a few moments... and if you have a clear sense of an answer please offer that in prayer. But, if you don't have a sense of what light, hope, or transformation would look like in this please offer that in prayer.

The words from the Mumford song could even be a helpful prayer: *'(God)...give me hope in the darkness that I will see the light 'cause oh (this gives) me such a fright. But I will hold on with all of my might. Just promise me that we'll (all) be alright...'*

Let's sit with this for about a minute... and, then I'll close with prayer.

Gracious God, we give thanks for the gift of our lives and your love. We give thanks for songs that inspire and comfort, and for questions that deepen faith. We offer to you the things that trouble us, and in your grace... ask for light and hope. We pray in the name of the one called Light of the World, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.