

Compassion is Resilience

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 16 February 2025

A Reflection by Mikali Anagnostis

Epiphany 6C

Isaiah 6: 1-8; Luke 5 1-11

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

Thank you so much for inviting us to be here with you today. It's been a hard time, for you as a congregation, but for the world generally. Certainly I've been feeling the heaviness of what's been happening around the world this last month. I think it's these connections with our wider family that are so important for us to stay resilient in a time like this, so thank you. It's that resilience that I want to reflect on today.

This passage comes from the Sermon on the Plain, Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount. As Jesus proclaims blessing for the poor and woe to the rich, he includes, "*blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you, because of the Son of Man. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, for surely your reward is great in heaven; for that is what their ancestors did to the prophets*".

What does it mean for us to be "*hated... because of the Son of Man*". When I hear this I think about Matthew 25, '*I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me*'. Jesus identifies himself as the outsider, and he identifies his followers as those who are on the outside with him. James Cone, who fearlessly criticised the white American church, and knew what it was to be hated for the sake of Christ, says '*Knowing God means being on the side of the oppressed, becoming one with them, and participating in the goal of liberation*'. As many of you know, to share an identity with the oppressed, is to share in the shame that society heaps on them.

Maybe in these words from the gospel of Luke we can hear the voice of a God who is incarnate in the oppressed, inviting us to solidarity. Inviting us to recognise our shared life, our shared being. Inviting us not to pragmatically stay in a place of influence, if it betrays our values and betrays the dignity of our siblings who are locked out.

This struggle can be a weary one. I think of a couple I know who lost their jobs in the church because of their solidarity with queer people. Or a friend who faced years of legal battles because of his frontline action to stop mining on Wangan and Jagalingou Country. We can be weighed down by the time scarcity or emotional labour. But I know for myself, what can be more insidious, is the way we are weighed down by mirroring the hatred of those who cultivate injustice in the world. Isn't hate a heavy thing to carry?

In the next few verses after today's passage, Jesus tells his audience to bless those who hate you, to pray for them, to love them. To see their belovedness, even as they betray the image of God in themselves.

At the end of last year, I got to attend a gathering of young, faith-based leaders from all over the Pacific region. At one point in the summit, a delegate from Kanaky, also known as New Caledonia, shared about his people's struggle for self-determination from the French, and the colonial violence that they have endured especially this last year. He closed by praying for the eleven Kanaks who had been killed since May last year, at the hands of the French. But to my surprise, he also prayed for the two French police officers who had been killed, telling us, every loss of human life is a tragedy. It was remarkable that in asserting the humanity of even the French police who are oppressing his people, he actually asserted his own humanity. He revealed the image of God in himself.

How do we keep that flame of compassion alive? How might we leave space to nourish that flame of compassion? And how might we be attentive enough to notice when it is going dim? Because if we can nourish that flicker of God's love in us, instead of succumbing to hate, I believe we can be sustained by it. Compassion is resilience.

*Blessed are those who trust in the Lord,
whose trust is the Lord.
8 They shall be like a tree planted by water,
sending out its roots by the stream.
It shall not fear when heat comes,
and its leaves shall stay green;
in the year of drought it is not anxious,
and it does not cease to bear fruit.*

Amen