

Courage. Compassion. Joy.

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 23 February 2025

Notes for a Reflection by Rev Geoff Ivers

Epiphany 7C

Genesis 45: 3-11; and 15; Luke 6: 27-38

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

Good morning, I am Rev Geoff Ivers, the interim pastor at Metropolitan Community Church, Sydney located in Petersham. Thank you for your welcome.

In this moment I recognize the great cloud of witnesses and ministers who have stood here and lead so many people in the faith over the years.

Greetings from your siblings, brothers and sisters of MCC Sydney congregation.

Reminder of last week lectionary reading

- The Beatitudes on the level ground.
- The poor are in the kin-dom of God
- The hungry will be filled.
- Those who weep shall laugh.

Those who are persecuted for their faith in Jesus shall have joy and a heavenly reward. The blessings. I can live with that.

I see and know God who is committed to social well-being as well as spiritual transformation. To see people become whole and holy. Creating a community of compassionate people concerned with all diversity of life.

Then Jesus gives the disciples an extra instruction. As if the greatest commandment wasn't enough to be living by. To love God wholeheartedly and love your neighbour as yourself.

I have enough energy to focus on that commandment.

Then Jesus has to add another ethical construct for me to live by.

"Love your enemies. Do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who mistreat you." My conversation with Jesus goes like this;

Really Jesus? Isn't loving God and my wonderful neighbour enough?

Well, no Geoff. I hear Jesus reply. Ok how?

I love nouns not verbs. Nouns mean I can remain idealistic, informed not activated into action. But Jesus knows this of me so he gave me verbs: *Love, do good, bless, pray.*

Jesus directs me into action. Not something abstract but something that is demonstrated. Love that manifests itself in goodness, in prayer, in blessing.

And this is to be love that responds to hostility, bad and demeaning behaviour and mistreatment. Yes even to love our enemies.

Though if someone is in danger or is being put in harm's way physically, emotionally or spiritually by another then there needs to be protection and appropriate action taken to keep those persons safe.

In the context of where and when Jesus was teaching, the enemies were probably considered as the ruling Roman empire or tax collectors or even the overbearing religious leaders of the day.

In a personal context, enemies are those who resent what we have, both in possessions and in our faith spirituality. Enemies are the ones who believe they are right in everything and take possession accordingly.

The edict Jesus was speaking may be summed up by a quote from a bible commentary. *"The greatest possible resolution of conflict is for us to help transform an enemy into a friend of God through our positive acts of love."* (*Faith in Action Study Bible*). Loving, doing good, praying, blessing.

During this time of year as we celebrate the diversity of the rainbow community, I think it's fitting that I stand here in this sacred space with the angels above. For is not the journey of loving unconditionally about Courage, Compassion and Joy?

(Tell the story of Mardi Gras and MCC Sydney.)

When I hear the story of Joseph I see an example of *"do to others as you would have them do to you."*

Joseph had every reason to intensely dislike his brothers for selling him off to Egypt and to seek revenge. But today's instalment of the story models for us what it means to love unconditionally and restore relationships. Joseph took courage in his circumstances. He prayed, and did good things even for his captors. And Pharaoh was blessed with Joseph's understanding and discernment of God working through him to enable people to live through famine and survive.

And then Joseph had compassion for his brothers and family. He chose to forgive his brothers. He chose to use his position to do good, to share of his prosperity and to renew relationships that had been lost for so long.

Which lead to lots of weeping. But it was weeping for Joy. Joy that was unspeakable. Joy that was in abundance. Because, as Jesus said *"Give, and it will be given to you; a full measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over."*

Joy overflows as we do to others as you would have them do to you.

This is not something that we do just within our faith community. It requires us to have relational contact outside the walls of church buildings and activities.

I have a story to share with you that comes from a friend, Sarah, and members of MCC Sydney. Sarah has given permission to share this story.

Sarah and her partner were out enjoying a night out. When they arrived back home there was a note on the front door from a neighbour. It wasn't a happy note.

It said "*Neighbour, control your dog's barking all night. Many people are not happy. Fix this or else "Legal Action."*"

Well it wasn't Sarah who had the dog. However instead of ignoring it Sarah went to all the neighbours in the street with the note asking if it was from them. There was no signature on the note.

Four doors away on the fifth door she knocked on, there was an answer. The person opened the door and said yeah that's me. His name is John.

Sarah and John spoke for a long time and she shared with him what the previous neighbour had said about a poor old Cavoodle named Ted. Ted had been left home alone while his people went on holidays.

The neighbour's children would go in everyday and feed Ted and apparently lock him outside. Ted would bark and cry all night long and could be heard quite a way down the street. However when he was kept inside there was not a bark to be heard.

Sarah and John talked. They talked about neighbourly communication. They talked about the harshness of his words. They talked about being Christian. They talked about how things might have been done differently. They talked a lot.

When Sarah left she shook John's hand, that she had offered to him, and wished him a great new year.

Then in the morning on the front step of Sarah's place she found a bunch of fresh flowers and a greeting card.

Inside the card John had written; Thank you for being so patient and understanding. I learned a huge lesson yesterday. Please accept the flowers (home grown) as a token of my appreciation. I hope it brightens your day.

The card front cover said:

"When action meets compassion, Lives Change!"

Courage. Compassion. Joy.

What a blessing! When hearts are opened by acts of courage and compassion, the Spirit blesses in abundant Joy!

From the writing of Henri Nouwen:

“Joy is essential to the spiritual life. Whatever we may think or say about God, when we are not joyful, our thoughts and words cannot bear fruit. Jesus reveals to us God’s love so that his joy may become ours and that our joy may become complete. Joy is the experience of knowing that you are unconditionally loved and that nothing—sickness, failure, emotional distress, oppression, war, or even death—can take that love away...”

Sing *“I’ve Got Joy and It’s Down in My Heart.”*

For us it begins here, encountering the risen Christ in the word spoken and the bread broken, and as we do we learn to recognise Jesus in places ever more unexpected.

So as we encounter the Christ here, in this sanctuary, in this sacred moment. May we then Rise and go out, ready to acknowledge and celebrate Christ wherever and in whoever we encounter him.

My prayer is that Christ’s call to us and to others is to offer ourselves, ever more courageously, with great compassion, into the servanthood of God so that Joy may abound in our community of Christian faith.

Amen!