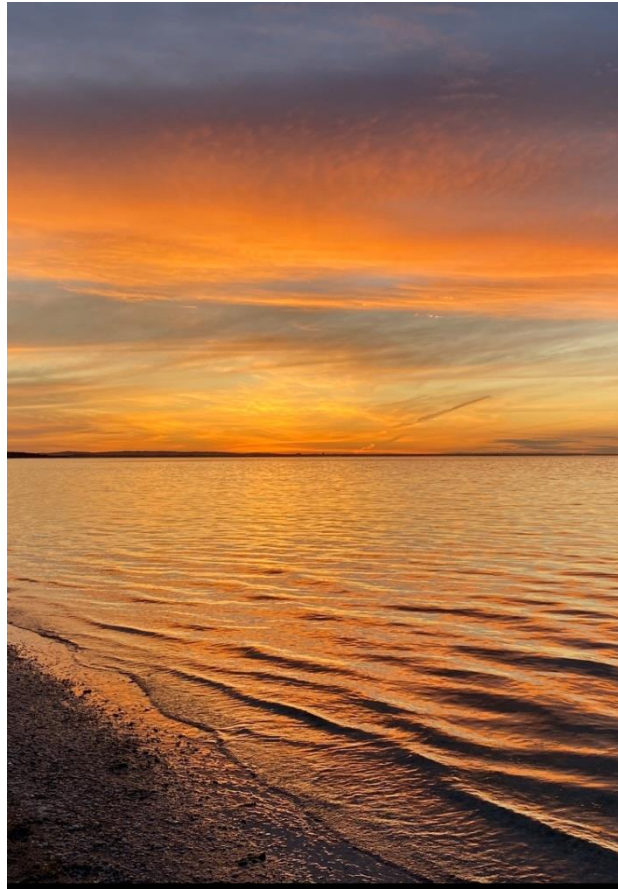


Into the Deep



⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.” ⁵ Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” Luke 5:4-8

In these days of lockdown and partial easing of restrictions, it’s hard to see where we are going and how long it will take to get there. Like the mariners of old, we are in uncharted waters that are deep, strange and unfamiliar. Nothing about our lives is “normal”. We have been thrown out of our comfort zone and plunged into a new and uncertain way of life that has shaken us to the core. But it is not just our households that have been turned upside down. Around the world everything seems unhinged and frightening with turbulent weather events becoming the norm rather than the exception. From fires in California to floods in parts of Greece, and daily disasters elsewhere, the news is daunting. Just recently in our own state, thousands of birds had to be destroyed because of

an outbreak of bird flu. Add the Covid-19 crisis into the mix and I can understand and feel the anxiety rising in me, and all around me. I understand the feeling of being “out of my depth”.

Yet, going into the deep is not unfamiliar to us who follow the call of Jesus. Indeed Jesus told Peter to cast his net into the deep after a whole night of unsuccessful fishing. Peter’s response was swift and reactionary. Jesus wasn’t the fisherman after all. Peter was! Yet, he did as Jesus asked and there was suddenly an abundance of fish for everyone. Peter’s response afterwards is quite natural. In the face of such generosity, such abundance what would you do? I think Peter’s response is what I would say too. “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man.” (or woman in my case).

What does it mean for us to delve into the deep, into the dark waters of uncertainty? Surely, if we follow Peter’s example the result will be for our benefit. To do that requires faith and trust, not just in the Lord, but in our-selves as well. Sometimes I think about the radical thinking of Jesus versus the mindset of the apostles while Jesus walked among them. No wonder they often got it wrong, especially Peter. Two thousand years later we are still trying to understand his teachings and grapple with their meaning for our lives now, living in the twenty first century.

This time away from celebrating Mass has forced many of us, including me, to re-evaluate what our faith is really all about. What it actually means to our lives. We are challenged now to journey towards God by ourselves, without the support of our faith community. That has been really difficult. The Eucharist is central to our lives, but now we are called to be a Eucharistic people. To be the bread broken and the wine poured out for others in as very practical and tangible way.

How do we do that? I have seen lots of examples of it in my everyday life. During the first lockdown people rallied to help neighbours or friends with shopping or medication pick-ups. Families were finding creative ways to keep in touch and connect over the internet. Young families were spending more time together without the rushing and business of life pre Covid-19. With the second lockdown, particularly for our brothers and sisters in Melbourne, it has been a bit harder to find those positive vibes as the tension has built and people have had enough. The strain of family disconnection and isolation has been heart wrenching and mentally scaring.

There is a lot of anger and disappointment with the lockdown, yes, but there is also an acknowledgment that we need to look out for each other much better than we did before the lockdown started. If anything the lockdown has highlighted, in a devastating way, the flaws in our society and just how many people slip through the cracks, particularly for our elderly citizens.

Even though difficult times bring out the best and the worst out in us, I am amazed at the thoughtfulness and generosity of people in our community. Children at the school where my son works as a teacher wrote to elderly people in a nursing home to brighten their day. I’m told it had a very positive effect on the elderly citizens there. I am continuously humbled by individuals who week after week bring in their thanks giving envelopes, or donate food to the pantry, or give a donation to our sister parish in East Timor. With Café light closed all our fundraising came to a halt, yet there are those in the community who have remembered our commitment to Viqueque, and continue to give generously. Our pantry continues to support those who are struggling to buy food and our volunteers continue to serve them. There is so much that still goes on quietly behind the scenes.

If this strange year has taught me anything, it has made me realise how fragile life can be and how much of it I have taken for granted. Most people who have had a health scare would relate. Sometimes it takes a crisis for us to stop and ponder the important things in life. It feels like we have all had that “awakening” to appreciate each other and life in general, a little more consciously. The politics in the world might be a little crazy (when have they not been?) But the world is still a beautiful place. However, the earth is fragile and must be protected for our future generations to inherit. It would be wonderful if all countries could work together to take the climate debate more seriously in days to come. My hope, like many of us, is that some good things will come from all this suffering for the good of our society, as we emerge from this crisis into a new way of thinking that is more inclusive and much less self-serving.

For me this has been a time of both anxiety and grace. I have family with me and family in lockdown. Time moves on very quickly though and come the New Year some of my family are moving interstate. They are with me right now, so I have this time with them that would have been lost to me otherwise. It has also been a time to reflect on my life, my story, and my faith. It has been a challenge for me to consciously work on my prayer life and my ministry.

Like many others today, I am wrestling with my direction in life. Where is God leading me now? What are the lessons I need to learn from the time we have been through this year? How can I serve more faithfully? Where do I start with the inner work that I need to do? I do not really know. I am in the deep waters, not quite sure where I am going but trusting that God will continue to lead me through my fear and hesitation. Not only lead me, but open the doors that need to be opened for my growth and my benefit. I am not the centre of the universe, I know, but I still want to know God’s abundant love and life in my own story.

For us then, as people of faith, we are invited to surrender our fear and anxiety to the God whose generosity is boundless. This requires an openness to receive direction, and willingness to consciously set aside time for quiet prayer and discernment. Anxiety is natural but the deep waters are calling. What are the fears that hold us back from casting our nets wide into that deep? Jesus tells us often enough “Do not be afraid.” Perhaps now, more than ever before, we need to pray for the courage to take that first step of surrender, and trust that the Lord will meet us the rest of the way. As we wade into the deep, unsure of where we are going, Lord, help us to remember that you have a plan for each of us and more than enough love to encourage, sustain and guide us through our journey.