**St AndrewsoTT Easter 16 Apr 2017 John 20: 1-18. The Source of Spirituality**

**John 20:1-18 The Empty Tomb**Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. **2**So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, “They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don’t know where they have put him!” **3**So Peter and the other disciple started for the tomb. **4**Both were running, but the other disciple outran Peter and reached the tomb first.**5**He bent over and looked in at the strips of linen lying there but did not go in. **6**Then Simon Peter came along behind him and went straight into the tomb. He saw the strips of linen lying there, **7**as well as the cloth that had been wrapped around Jesus’ head. The cloth was still lying in its place, separate from the linen. **8**Finally the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went inside. He saw and believed. **9**(They still did not understand from Scripture that Jesus had to rise from the dead.) **10**Then the disciples went back to where they were staying.

**Jesus Appears to Mary Magdalene 11**Now Mary stood outside the tomb crying. As she wept, she bent over to look into the tomb **12**and saw two angels in white, seated where Jesus’ body had been, one at the head and the other at the foot. **13**They asked her, “Woman, why are you crying?” “They have taken my Lord away,” she said, “and I don’t know where they have put him.” **14**At this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, but she did not realize that it was Jesus. **15**He asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it you are looking for?” Thinking he was the gardener, she said, “Sir, if you have carried him away, tell me where you have put him, and I will get him.” **16**Jesus said to her, “Mary.” She turned toward him and cried out in Aramaic, “Rabboni!” (which means “Teacher”). **17**Jesus said, “Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet ascended to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.’” **18**Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!” And she told them that he had said these things to her.

**Today**

Today,

we Christians

(yes, us, that stuffy lot)

are making the country happy

(well, perhaps not tourist town retailers)

but definitely

we are making others happy today.

They get to have a holiday on this holy day

accompanied by chocolate eggs

and other forms of chocolate which have

been woven into the urban legend over the years.

(This year a chocolate kiwi in the supermarket aisles.)

It’s right the general population

is invited

to enjoy, to re-create, to celebrate

at Easter

for that is what we celebrate too

the joy,

the release,

the freedom,

(chocolate covered or not.)

Today we embrace the Spirituality of Life,

Thankful we have come through the darkness of death.

We are more than only unscathed;

Easter reminds us there is transforming power afoot in the world

and, if we allow it,

it might just transform us!

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In the weekend section of the Dompost this Easter there is an article on how four different women practice their spirituality. The writer chose to interview a druid, a non-orthodox Muslim, a humanist and a Catholic, namely Joy Cowley. It would be interesting to have a conversation about whether those four choices covered all the bases, but there they were, four women looking happy and contented with their spiritual choices. Each option read like a positive addition to life, stressing respect for others and the earth.

Lay alongside this two comments I heard in two days from crime writers – to the effect that because crime writers wrote about the dark side of life and get that shadow stuff out in their writing, they end up being balanced and sane people themselves. One Swedish crime writer who sets her books on one of the furthest flung Swedish islands, which has a population of only 89 people in the winter, suggested that peaceful Sweden, which has not been to war for 200 years, liked to read crime novels because they knew their lives were safe and the crime was only happening between the covers of her books. Why is the dealing with the dark side of life important, in these writers’ eyes anyway, for a happy life?

Where then is the source of spirituality? Is it only an Easter Day kind of experience? Or, does a spiritually balanced life need the dark side lurking somewhere within?

I was talking with the children about how bad things happening to you are related to their resolution if you are fortunate to achieve that.

It would be unrealistic to assume we could have a life which was only good and fair and sunny. We know that when the land only receives sunlight day after day with no rain, drought results. Churches which preach a prosperity gospel or urge the people to acknowledge only the triumphs in their lives miss an important source of the Spirituality of Life. Even liberals in wanting to emphasis the Love and acceptance of God, to underline the welcome which is within the heart of the sacred, may find themselves with a marshmallow kind of Gospel and wonder why the challenge has gone.

I remember when I had ME or Tapanui flu for what effectively ended up being 10 years, frequently trying to rise above it, to find the resolution, the remedy, the end of fatigue and boredom. When, finally, improvement came, it still felt like I had been dragged through a gorse bush backwards, it was as if the scratches and tears in my clothing from such a rough ride were still evident in my soul or psyche. The Easter Day resurrection had arrived. I was well enough to work again full time, but it was a victory which carried scars with it. Those scars were a vital part of the transformation from illness to wellness. My experience resonates with the later story of Jesus showing scars to Thomas which makes an important point besides that of the importance of doubt - resurrection experience inevitably carries the marks of what has gone before. My ‘Good Friday’ ME experience was relatively short – an unexpected bout of mumps - followed by a 10 year long Easter Saturday. Some people have longer Good Fridays, shorter Easter Saturdays or their Easter Sunday may dawn more slowly, but to call Good Friday ‘Good’ is to buy into the faith that tragedy and even death, pain and sorrow *can be transformed.*

I am not sure whether the four women interviewed for Your Weekend magazine felt they needed to put the positives of their spirituality or whether the writer emphasised that side of their story. Some negatives of being attached to the Catholic church were named by the writer and probably by Joy herself who has a balanced view of life’s ups and downs and the depths to which spirituality can take you. But if today’s contemporary society is looking for a spiritualty which is only ‘up’ they embrace a false spirituality which will not sustain them through all their life experiences.

I don’t think the source of spirituality in particularly Christian spirituality is the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. I think its source, its genesis, its beginning is in the tragic confrontation between ethic, teaching and compassion of Jesus with human beings who could not stand such a bright light searching their lives and establishment religion. I believe it is in this dark and violent confrontation between a gentle but determined teacher and a powerful and controlling establishment where we find the source of the spirituality of Life.

For the *source* of spirituality is the moment of the *transformation* of death into life, of sorrow into joy, of bondage into freedom.

The backstory of Pope Francis is a case in point. A movie has already come round the movie theatres but as I remember it really began when he was Archbishop Bergoglio, already transformed from the apparently more authoritarian and rigid priest who had been auxiliary bishop of Buenos Aires. Another documentary I saw recently suggests that Bergoglio’s rigidity against the work of priests in the slums at that stage of his life may have led to their capture and torture at the hands of the military junta.

This traumatic experience changed his stance markedly. Later, as archbishop of Buenos Aires he increased the numbers of slum priests and spoke out boldly on social justice matters. Without that hard and risky experience, and without his reflecting on that and allowing the experience to change him, I suggest we would not have the Pope we have today.

The public movie took a less brutally frank stance on Bergoglio’s early life as a priest. I was glad to hear about it in the documentary, however, because a spirituality which has risen like a phoenix from the ashes of a conservatively rigid position is likely to be deeply enough rooted to be sustained in the difficult job Pope Francis now has of being priest to the whole world.

Think back over your life to those events and attitudes from which you have moved, from which you may indeed have travelled far. They are the deep rich dark earth within which the seeds of your present spirituality put out first the tentative roots and shoots, then the stems and leaves that now flourish. That is, that will be the case if you have tended those seeds, watered them and fed them, sheltered them and exposed them to the sun. Otherwise your life is just a pile of compost.

Like the yolk of an egg, the seeds planted in the compost of our lives, which lie in the darkness of the tomb of the earth at first, these seeds are the source of the spiritualty which truly enhances life and brings true joy. Without the compost – without the shit that happens in all our lives – these seeds of Life cannot grow.

When the bad things happen in our life, they are food for our growth. In time, whether a short time or a longer time, they will grow, and one day we know the joy of new life. Easter tells us this is so. The mystery of how it happens is still a mystery hidden deep within us requiring us to trust the source, trust the process and enjoy the life which comes from both.

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