**St Andrew’s on The Terrace Sunday 10 March Lent 1, Pride 1**

**Readings for the Gathering**

**Hebrew Bible** [**Genesis 9:16**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Genesis+9:16&version=NIV)

*From the end of the Noah’s ark story of the Great Flood*

Whenever the **rainbow** appears in the clouds, I will see it and remember the everlasting covenant between God and all living creatures of every kind on the earth.”

[**Ezekiel 1:28**](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Ezekiel+1:28&version=NIV)

*From the account of the prophet Ezekiel’s vision and call*

Like the appearance of a **rainbow** in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord. When I saw it, I fell facedown, and I heard the voice of one speaking.

**Gospel Luke 4: 1-13**

*The traditional reading for the first Sunday in Lent.* Jesus Is Tested in the Wilderness

**4**Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, left the Jordan and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness, **2**where for forty days he was tempted by the devil. He ate nothing during those days, and at the end of them he was hungry. **3**The devil said to him, “If you are the Son of God, tell this stone to become bread.”

**4**Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Humanity shall not live on bread alone.’”

**5**The devil led him up to a high place and showed him in an instant all the kingdoms of the world. **6**And the devil said to him, “I will give you all their authority and splendour; it has been given to me, and I can give it to anyone I want to.**7**If you worship me, it will all be yours.”

**8**Jesus answered, “It is written: ‘Worship the Lord your God and serve God only.’”

**9**The devil led him to Jerusalem and had him stand on the highest point of the temple. “If you are the Son of God,” the devil said, “throw yourself down from here. **10**For it is written:

“‘God will command the angels concerning you to guard you carefully; **11**they will lift you up in their hands,  so that you will not strike your foot against a stone.’]” **12**Jesus answered, “It is said: ‘Do not put the Lord your God to the test.’” **13**When the all this tempting was finished the devil left him until an opportune time.

**Contemporary Reading “2016 Community Hero Awards, Australia ”**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B3R2UJcyirY>

**Community Hero Award winner - Rev Dorothy McRae-McMahon**

For over 30 years Dorothy has been a spiritual leader for LGBTI people and the LGBTI community and has championed acceptance and inclusion of LGBTI people in faith-based organisations. A peace activist in the 1960s, Dorothy was ordained a minister in the Uniting Church in 1982, leading the

Pitt St congregation in Sydney and then taking on the role of National Director of Mission before becoming one of the first Uniting Church ministers to ‘come out’, subsequently becoming a leader in the successful campaign to have homosexual ministers formally accepted within the Uniting Church, arguing that homosexuality was a sign of wholeness rather than evidence of moral decay. After retiring in 1997, [Dorothy] has remained engaged in ministry in an inner-Sydney Uniting Church, worked as co-editor of the South Sydney Herald and has continued to be recognised as an

internationally renowned writer, liturgist and feminist theologian

**Reflection for the Gathering**

It has been my privilege to talk with quite a few gay and trans people about church and God and things like that. It might be on a phone call where the person calls to see if they would be welcome here. We talk for a while and sometimes the person turns up, other times they don’t, at least at first. If you have had a few rebuffs it is hard to try again. Often rainbow people who keep trying with the church have come from conservative backgrounds. The gift of the conservative Christianity they have known is that it has left them with a yearning to be loved and accepted by God and the strong need to know you are on a spiritual journey. The burden of such a background is that once you have become embedded in that ethos and that journey, on coming out to your congregation, you may find your former spiritual companions melt away into the mist, or worse, block your way on the road.

Some less conventional churches such as St Andrew’s get the welcoming and accepting thing right. People within them, have moved to a place where they accept all people whatever or whoever they are without caring too much whether that is an orthodox position or not. Sometimes however, the God talked about in those churches, (or sometimes the God NOT talked about in those churches) isn’t the same sound God as a conservative gay Christians might be used to. I wonder whether that is a disappointment. Having got the impression from others that God rejects you, it would be nice if it was that exact same God who could accept you now. I have been pondering this. I think it is the same God to whom we relate both here *and* in other more conventional churches. It is not *God* that has changed or been reinvented, it is a different pair of spectacles put on by the beholder which makes the difference. We will get into the key disputed texts within the Bible next week, so let’s put them aside for the moment and look at the general view of God we see in the Bible and as presented by the church.

The First Testament of the Bible is out of the Jewish religion. In this section of the Bible, a close relationship is forged between God and the tiny nation of Israel. They were located in one of the most disputed territories in the known world of the time. On the silk trade routes, Israel was hot property Over the centuries it suffered wave upon wave of foreign occupation and control. Sometimes, if they were lucky, they got away with becoming a tributary of the current dominant empire, where they were left pretty much alone, (as long as they paid tribute each year). At other times, as when Jesus lived there, they were fully occupied and controlled by a foreign power such as Rome.

So the concept of God being on our side was developed for an often oppressed and marginalised race. This was no dominant, established nuclear power, but a vulnerable group of generally subsistence farmers. Later the concept of God being ‘on our side’ was adopted by established Christendom – by the Holy Roman Empire - and later the British Empire, the Apartheid-supporting South African Government and even the Third Reich. *Then* the rhetoric of God is turned upside down – the rich and powerful claim ‘dibs’ with God. God slowly morphs into the protector of the elite acting as a judgmental, wrathful God towards those who break the establishment’s rules.

In rebellion against this, particularly at the time in rebellion against the dominant collusion of the Roman Catholic church and South American governments, in the 1950s and 60s, a new pair of theological spectacles were being used by what came to be known as ‘liberation theologians’. There was [Gustavo Gutiérrez](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustavo_Guti%C3%A9rrez) of Peru, [Leonardo Boff](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leonardo_Boff) of Brazil, [Juan Luis Segundo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juan_Luis_Segundo) of Uruguay, and [Jon Sobrino](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jon_Sobrino) of Spain. Together they popularized the phrase "[Preferential option for the poor](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Option_for_the_poor)".The new pair of spectacles they had put on to read Scripture and do their theology was a marxist socio economic analysis – which critiqued the use of class and wealth to discriminate against the lower socio economic levels of society. Liberation theology was the political [praxis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Praxis_%28process%29) of Latin American theologians. As its name suggests, it liberated people who had been held under by churches, governments and theologians. It was not popular with the ruling authorities, as represented by Cardinal Ratzinger who would become Pope Benedict. Boff was silenced by the church, and Gutierrez only fully reinstated with the Vatican in the last few years.

Praxis was an important word for these theologians – they critiqued strongly theology which was mere words and did not also carry with it care for the poor and action for social justice on a systemic scale. Liberation theologians pioneered the concept of putting on the spectacles of the context where you belong. Since, other liberation theologies have erupted and thrived – feminist theology looks at scriptures and God from a woman’s perspective, womanist theology looks from a black woman’s point of view. Black theology takes into account race. Rainbow theology takes into account sexual orientation and gender identity.

All these contextual theologies represent groups who have been marginalised from established society and often ill-treated within the conventional church – black and coloured communities, women, black women and the rainbow community. There are more.

This technique of reading the Gospels differently has sometimes been called looking at the Gospel from the underside.

Same God, different spectacles on the noses of those reading the Scriptures and reading God.

There is an irony inherent in the morphing of the Christian view from the viewpoint of a vulnerable Israel to a dominant British Empire view of Scripture. In this change, the very critique of imperial use of force and might in Scripture has been turned on its head to in fact *endorse* such use of power and might.

As we have studied in the monthly study group, when early Christians used the phrase “Jesus is Lord” it was, at the time, a subversive political statement challenging the politically correct words “Caesar is Lord”. When the theology of the Kingdom of God and the enthronement of Christ were developed it was in *contrast* to the kingdom of Caesar and the imperial throne of Rome. The use of ‘Kingship’ and ‘Lord’ in scripture was a critique and challenge to earthly power and control. Not that God was equally, if not more powerful, but that God’s power was, in fact, as Jesus says to Pilate, “not of this world”.

In a society which disrespects the rainbow community, both those of a different sexual orientation and those with changing gender identity, God is not on the side of the *disrespectors*, but on the side of the *disrespected*. Any who are oppressed marginalised, treated with prejudice and disdain, are the ones on whose side God is ranged.

When the majority take off their rose-coloured spectacles and put on their rainbow coloured spectacles, then they get a completely different view of the same God.

Following this line of sight, the wrath of God is quite properly directed at abusers, at homophobia, at prejudice and hate speech. So it shouldn’t be a surprise that as far back as the prophet Ezekiel, hundreds of years before Jesus, Ezekiel’s vision of God images the divine as brilliant and creative as a rainbow*. “Like the appearance of a****rainbow****in the clouds on a rainy day, so was the radiance around him. This was the appearance of the likeness of the glory of the Lord.”* When you think of a show of earthly glory it is usually the red and gold and purples which are used in coronations and crowns and regalia. If God, even the First Testament God, shows glory such as the rainbow shows, then softer blues and fresh young greens and everyday orange are also part of that glory. The flamboyant colours are part of the divine decorating scheme as well as the pastels and neutrals and quieter hues

So it is with us. If you are discriminated against because of your orientation or gender preference, or if you have been abused, neglected or ill-treated, the divine is on your side. God did not condone or command your shame or ill treatment. God does not condone the wrong deeds of your detractors, just as God does not condone when you slip up. The message of scripture is that all are loved, all are welcomed at the gate to home, whoever they are and whatever they have done.

This week I have been doing a lot of funeral talk and it reminded me of a book I read about what happens when we die – I think it has relevance to how we live also.

*The biblical myth has it that humankind were made out of the dust of the earth*

*and then divine breath was breathed into that clay figure*

*to bring it to life.*

*At the end of life, that figure of clay, fashioned from the dust of the earth,*

*is no longer the person we knew, and with respect,*

*the empty body is sent to rejoin the earth from whence it came.*

*Departed from that clay body is the essential breath of life,*

*which animated us and gave us vitality.*

*The great myth of life tells us this one person’s breath of life*

*sprang from that original divine breath.*

*In the act of death, it is freed to return home to its Source.*

*So life’s small breath joins indivisibly with the Breath of Life.*

*And how could that breath be judged in any way since,*

*as the myth tells us that breath was first divine?*

These are big theological ideas, not historical facts I am talking about here.

We all have different bodies, different desires,

motives, hormones, affections.

The biblical myth tells us those were created by God

The biblical story tells us too that we are all animated by that divine breath

so we are all intimately one with the sacred.

Looking at this with rainbow spectacles,

We can see that we are all different colours

which have all come from one Source of pure Light,

refracted by our types and experiences

and by the rain which falls into our lives

into all the different hues and shades

just as pure white light is refracted by the rain into the colours of the bow.

Our world is only complete when all the colours are present

When will our church learn that it will only be complete

when all colours are present?

Jesus refused in the desert to be tempted by the devil

to be arrogant about his own safety.

He refused to be controlled only by his physical desires.

He refused to accept a world where power and control were all his.

In those refusals he shows us the heart of God, to not lord it over the weak and powerless but,

every time the **rainbow** appears in the clouds, to remember the everlasting covenant between the rainbow God and *all* living creatures of *every* kind on the earth.

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