

Third Sunday after Pentecost – St Paul's Manuka – 2 July 2017**Preacher: The Venerable Dr Brian Douglas****Genesis 22: 1-14****Psalm 13****Romans 6: 12-23****Matthew 10: 40-42**

A magician got a job on an ocean liner, it wasn't a big act but in view of the fact that the trip wasn't very long it didn't matter. Every time the magician performed, the Captain's parrot would watch his act. However, after a few trips, the parrot started to say, 'Funny how all the cards say ten of spades' and 'He's got another bunch of flowers up his sleeve' or 'He has another hat under the table'. The parrot was not very welcoming and was ruining the act! A mutual hatred grew between the parrot and the magician, but there wasn't much the magician could do about it because it was the Captain's parrot. Then one day they were all shipwrecked!! The magician came to floating on some wood in the middle of the ocean, and there, lo and behold was the parrot sitting on the same piece of wood. The first day passed in icy silence, the second day was even worse, at the end of the third day the parrot said 'OK, OK, you win, I give up, what have you done with the boat?!'

How we welcome other people into our space is important. The parrot was like many people – unwelcoming, a real kill joy and someone keen to ruin another person's act. I guess it stuck in the magician's craw that the parrot was so mean, but what could he do, it was the captain's parrot. The parrot was very critical of the magician and when it all went wrong the parrot blamed the magician, now believing he had the power. Sometimes we are very critical of God – even blaming God. Why did such a bad thing happen to a good person? Why are some people wealthy and I am not? Why do I not have what I really want? Oh I know – it's God's fault and religion makes no sense any more – we don't need that. I've noticed that this sort of simplistic thinking comes out when people speak about the census results on religion. Perhaps you saw the census results. Not very reassuring for Christianity.

There are now more people with no religion (30%) in Australia than Roman Catholics (22%). Anglicans now make up only 13% of the Australian population down from 17% five years ago. In the ACT it is worse with only 10% of the population being Anglican.

And then you hear people talk about the census results on religion. One person I saw on the news said: 'I am more for science than religion'. How ridiculous. Science and religion are not alternatives or opposites.

All you have to do is listen to some of the world's greatest scientists – people like

Albert Einstein. Einstein had great faith in science but he was also convinced of a spiritual dimension and the plan of God in nature. He saw no conflict between science and religion, except in religion's and for that matter science's fundamentalist interpretations.

Religion helps us to know the divine other and ourselves and to come to terms with the fact that we are not the sum of all there is. Religion and science work in harmony not in opposition. People sometimes believe they are the sum of all there is and that science can solve all their problems. This is scientific fundamentalism and that is as dangerous as religious fundamentalism. And then like the parrot in my story there is the shipwreck of life. Suddenly in the face of a problem like sickness or death science, or religion for that matter, does not have all the answers. Sometimes we find that people, once they have finished blaming God, want to know the God who created them and the promise of life after death and receive comfort in their grief. Our task as church is to welcome these people, not condemn them, because in welcoming those in life who are shipwrecked, we welcome Jesus and in welcoming Jesus we find ourselves and meaning for who and what we are in God's creation. In this spiritual quest we are aided by science and religion but not given all

the answers by either. Questions and ambiguity are part of both science and religion. In both we can find meaning and ourselves. Einstein saw science and religion as the asking of questions, not the supply of answers.

The picture the Gospel presents for us today shows that the way we treat and welcome other people is often the way we treat God. Are we welcoming in our relations with other people and are we welcoming in our relations with God? Or are we just like the parrot? God comes to us in so many ways – in the beauty of creation, in the actions and care of other people, through the words of the Bible, through the experience of worship and prayer and through the person and work of Jesus.

Today in this short Gospel passage Jesus tells his disciples and us, “Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me”. As we welcome and accept one another we are really welcoming and accepting Jesus. As we welcome and accept Jesus we are really welcoming God. It is in this welcome we come to know ourselves. The gift of God is free and generous but sometimes coming to know that can be hard work as Abraham found out in the Old Testament when God asked him to sacrifice his son – obedience can cost but the gift of God is free. But it is there in the shipwreck of life and all its chaos, such as Abraham experienced, that hope emerges. It is all so

intimately connected. Reaching beyond ourselves to touch the divine other and knowing that we are part of something bigger than ourselves, in both science and religion, does not depend on us or simplistic answers but on God's love for us which leads us to discovery. It is in surrender and obedience that we are found by God. We deceive ourselves if we think salvation is some sort of personal decision.

The essence of the Christian message is that God accepts us, despite our shortcomings and despite our unusual and unattractive habits. God sent his Son Jesus for all people, not just for some people. God welcomes us so we should welcome others. And yes that welcome comes with questions more than answers. Welcome comes with ambiguity rather than simplistic solutions. Sometimes there are problems. Life is like that.

A very important question for us as Christian people is: Who are people we do not welcome? Who are the people we shun or walk away from? Our country wrestles with this issue in regard to refugees at this very time. Some people see refugees as dangerous and so refuse to welcome them. They walk away. Others are ready to welcome refugees since they acknowledge a shared humanity and the need to reach out to others in need as part of our shared responsibility to care for all God's people. The

response we make as a nation is vitally important. Some of the ways we have responded as a nation in recent times have been less than welcoming and it is important that we consider the plight of refugees carefully. Thank God that our refugee action group has made some very positive moves in the direction of welcome. We were privileged to hear the young man Mustafa speak about his journey and life at our recent Fork and Talk Lunch. His face and whole manner was one of positivity and welcome and yet he had experienced and is still experiencing more distress than we may ever know.

God welcomes us in Jesus. God accepts us just the way we are. God accepts us and takes us back when we stray away. God does not hold our faults against us but welcomes us and shows us great hospitality.

If God has welcomed us in Jesus, surely we should welcome the others, both near and far, who are part of God's creation.