

## SERMON FOR EASTER 3

14 APRIL 2024

ST DAVID'S, BURNSIDE

You'd agree, relationships are important. We are all in a relationship with more than two or three people and here we are in the company of a congregation of people. Relationships can be good and not so good. They're all there inflating or deflating our lives. We go for the good ones most of the time and bear with or get rid of the not so good ones. Life is a mixed bag of relationships.

Soon after Joan and I married, as our relationship developed - after marriage you do continue to discover the attributes of the relationship - my electrical work from time to time would take me away from home to outstations in the highlands of New Guinea. I would stay with kiaps or the solitary school teacher for the time my work required. Those convenient acquaintances born out of necessity are not the same as friends nor do they produce the kind of relationships that last.

Today, each of our readings ask us to determine whether our relationship with Jesus and through him with God, is one best described as a convenient acquaintanceship or an abiding friendship.

This is why so soon after the events of Good Friday and Easter Day and during the early weeks of the Easter season we are brought to consider how best to describe our relationship with Jesus. It's unsurprising that we should be asked to do this. The Passion of Jesus Christ with Good Friday and especially Easter Day are individually, and together, the moment God comes home to us. God comes to us and says 'I'm home with you, and it is forever.' This is an action by God as the scriptures testify.

I also hear him saying - and you will all fully realise this when you make these Good Friday and Easter Day events the substance of your relationship with me.

The events of Good Friday and Easter Day not only make us right with God but right with each other. We should all know what this means. In the words of John, *"See what the Father has given us, that we should be called children of God; and that is what we are. Beloved, we are God's children now."* 1 John 3.1-2

Please understand why I am asking you to consider the liveliness or otherwise of your relationship with God. I must do the same. That is, whether the events of Jesus' passion have a marked effect on the way you and I regard ourselves and others. Do we love ourselves and others? This is an acceptable question because God thought we are worth it for the death and resurrection of Jesus was for our benefit and we must go on to say for the benefit of all humanity. You see it's all about relationships.

Now sin, and we have to consider sin if we want to understand the reason God gave up his son on the cross, is the religious word for separation, alienation, from the life force that gave us and continues to give us life. For the Christian this includes eternal life. Sin's meaning is the significant absence of having a relationship with God.

I earlier described my sense of separation and loneliness from Joan in those early days. I am not alone experiencing this kind of loneliness. We all miss those who were once very important in our daily lives. In parish life our happiness and contentment relies on others too. People like Lesley Hillier as an example, and not just because of her marvellous marmalade, Fr Peter Patterson and his artistic and his script writing ability is another. We don't use the word sin of course to describe the separation of a relationship with those who have died. But when we talk about not having a relationship with God the religious word sin becomes descriptive. It can describe our isolation from each other just as much as with dear departed friends.

The word sin is frequently heard in the texts of scripture as it examines our relationship with God - created in his image. And God created male and female life in his image with power to rule over creation. This is of importance when we consider the nature of sin.

So, I'm unconcerned this morning about sinful acts that may occupy our minds. Like, wasn't that a terrible thing to have happen? How could anyone do that? As reasonable as these responses are to all dastardly deeds I advocate that we mindfully decide whether a convenient acquaintanceship or an abiding friendship best describes our relationship with God.

And just in case we have missed the point, sin - the alienation and separation from God - can often be identified by the alienation and separation that may have been formed with a neighbour, that fellow traveller, that other person regarded by God as worthy of Jesus' passion.

Again if we have missed the point, the scriptures declare the truth that:

*"We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, 'I love God', yet hates his brother, (or bullies or belittles them) he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has to seen. And he has given us this command; Whoever loves God must also love his brother."* 1John 4.19-21.

We all make mistakes in our relationships but this scripture remains to jolt and inspire us to do better.

Fr John

Locum tenens