

## Salvation, the Gift of Life

29<sup>th</sup> June, Ordinary Sunday 13  
St Columba

Psalm 13  
Rmns 6:12-23  
Matt 10:40-42

With all the water around us and the cold and damp we have been experiencing it is hard for us to imagine the significance of the cup of cold water in the reading from Matthew that we have just heard.

Sometimes a cup of cold water turns out to be cup of hot coffee!

Both water and coffee can be essential elements of hospitality.

Both water and coffee, depending on the circumstances, can elicit the response, 'What a life saver!'

Hospitality and life are the twin themes of today's readings.

*Hospitality and life* as offered to us in the readings depend on relationships of reciprocity; giving and receiving.

Over the last few weeks I've been addressing some of the foundations for faith. Today I want to dwell a while on *life-giving hospitality* and why this is important to us as 'faithers', as Christians.

When we approach the Gospel today with its notions of welcome and the hospitality of offering a cup of cold water, we need to remember the dry and arid land of Palestine through which people travelled. A warm welcome and a cup of water could be the difference between life and death.

We don't have that particular experience in this country of plenty, but there are many things that we 'thirst' for nevertheless. Someone to listen to us for one thing, time to pause and take stock of ourselves and the shape of our inner lives for another. *A cup of coffee, might for us represent the gift of time to stop and someone to listen, or time to pause in the midst of busyness and think.*

The writer of Matthew's Gospel puts this passage at the end of the chapter that is about calling disciples together and sending them off with things to do. In this passage Jesus is presented as offering to them encouraging words as he instructs them on how they should behave and what they should to expect.

- He tells them they have authority over 'unclean spirits'; in other words, they could and should offer speak against things that destroy life; offer 'healing';

- he instructs them to stay only in the houses where they are welcomed; that they should be 'as wise as serpents and innocent as doves' because it is a political quagmire out there!;
- and, to remember they are at all times 'in the mind of God', because they are doing and proclaiming the good news of life that comes from commitment to the way of God that Jesus points to in his own life.

So in these few verses, the nervous disciples on the verge of leaving the comfort of the fellowship of the group (and dispersing two by two into who knows what!) are told that whoever welcomes them and offers them hospitality is receiving and offering hospitality to Jesus himself.

*They must have felt affirmed to be so closely identified with the person of Jesus!*

That affirmation still stands! Us too! '*Whoever gives a cup of water to one of these little ones...*' And the 'little ones'? Who are they? Jesus is not talking about children, not people small in stature, or young in age. In the imagery of his day he was referring to the ordinary people. People who held *no* positions of power and influence, people from whom *no* benefit could accrue if you were nice to them, ordinary people...workers, the poor, women, people from other races and ethnicities, people different from yourselves. *These were the 'little ones' who represented Jesus when offered life-giving water.*

Life-giving water, hot coffee, can rescue us from the edge of 'death' or from the depths of despair. I guess we have all been in need of rescue at some time in our lives, whether that was in the need for the physical sustenance of food and drink, or the need of an unstinting gift of time to listen to us unburden ourselves, or wise counsel to help us unravel a situation that seemed overwhelming.

The Westpac Rescue Helicopter is an image that comes to mind when I think about life-saving emergencies! The helicopter that can rescue us from the edge of death...Big, dramatic, one only...

These images, in 'Church Speak', point us toward '*salvation*'. It is a word that we often associate with big, one off, important ideas and complicated theology. In the First Testament, the Old Testament, the salvation or rescue idea is always associated with death or the threat of death. It is about physical safety and the preservation of life. And it has nothing directly to do with sin. In the New Testament, actually it is related more often to healing than to sin. We see this in the Gospel stories about healing or today's life-giving cup of cold water.

Numerous learned books have been written about 'salvation'. But for me, in simple terms, all that we need to remember is that salvation - or rescue or healing - which are our more commonly used words - is freely available and can be offered to one another, by each of us.

We engage in salvation when we act toward each other and toward the 'little ones' with the attitude of love and compassion that Jesus offered.

And, when we, as contemporary disciples, are prepared to go beyond our comfort zones to ensure that 'life giving' necessities are available to those who need them.

In this way, we too, participate with Jesus, in acts of 'salvation' amongst our contemporaries.

Psalm 13 suggests someone calling on God for a word of kindness; to be relieved of pain of sorrow so that they might regain fullness of life. We might all call on God to be relieved of our burdens too. When we look around our world there are millions who bear the burden of injustice and dehumanisation, who call out for food and recognition, for safety and for kindness.

Think of Zimbabwe, of the Sudan, of Burma;

think of the people who are unsafe or unhappy in their homes be they elderly, women or children; think of refugee and migrant families so far from all they are familiar with and from wider families who love them;

think of our earth, the environment that we are polluting so heavily that it does not have time to heal itself;

think of the people of our neighbourhood, people who you know, whose lives are diminished in any way.

Think of yourself...

How can you, how can we, reach out and offer an hospitable welcome, a healing hand? What part can we play in rescuing them from the edge of despair and death?

In as much as you offer these little ones a cup of cold water you too will know something of God's life - eternal life – for you too will be participating in saving acts; in salvation.

And we want to do these things, difficult though they might be from time to time, because the mind of God holds us warmly and safely knowing who we are, and we want to respond to that love. We can respond when we choose to pass on to others the love and care we ourselves experience in God; we can respond when we offer a cup of cold life-giving water, or a hot coffee.