

Knox Uniting Church Cluster

Sunday May 25th 2025 – (RCL: Easter 6, Year C)

Sermon (reflection) by Russell Croxford at Ferntree Gully Uniting Church

Bible passages: Revelation 21:10, 21:22-22:5 and John 14:25-30

'My view of the world.'

To help with me reflection I've selected some images which speak to me about some of the ideas and themes that come out of our bible readings today.



(NASA)

Firstly, we have this NASA photo taken from one of the Apollo missions, showing the earth, half shaded (as it always is!), rising above the lunar landscape. When I look at this image the earth looks so beautiful and peaceful. From a distance you can't see the pain and destruction. It just floats there peacefully in orbit around the sun. But we all know that on the surface of that peaceful looking planet, it is anything but peaceful.

Michael Collins, one of the astronauts on the 1969 Apollo 11 mission, said this about his view of the earth from space: "The thing that really surprised me was that it [Earth] projected an air of fragility. And why, I don't know. I don't know to this day. I had a feeling it's tiny, it's shiny, it's beautiful, it's home, and it's fragile".

We too may think of our earth as fragile. In fact, we may think of it as already very broken. Everywhere we look we see evil and destruction. Division and hate. Environmental damage. Every day there is bad news on our TVs. It's a bleak picture. And it's so easy to become depressed about that. I hear many people say to me that they are losing hope because of the state of the world, globally and even locally in our own country and neighbourhoods. Even as people of faith and hope we feel the pain and anguish, and it gets us down.

Yet Jesus says, in our John reading today, "Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not be afraid" (v27b). They are certainly comforting words, but *how* do we *not* be troubled and *not* be afraid? Let me attempt to offer some words of encouragement to help us with this challenge, because I sense there are times when we all need some lifting up when the state of the world is getting us down.



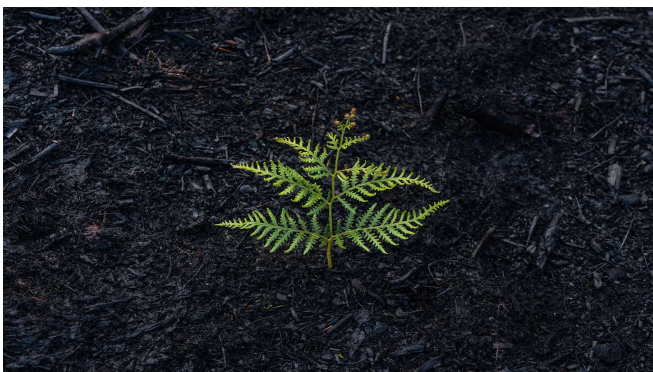
(PIXABAY FREE IMAGES)

My second picture is this one with a bright light in a dark forest. A thick forest at night is a scary place. Who knows what horrible thing is lurking in the shadows! It feels evil and foreboding. It closes in on us and it's easy to get lost in the darkness. I guess that's why dark forests feature in so many scary scenes in movies. It's an apt metaphor of life in a dark world.

The only effective companion in a dark forest is a light, because a light takes away the darkness and gives us comfort and guidance. The darkness cannot ever cope with the light.

In verse 30 of our John passage, Jesus says, "the ruler of this world is coming. He has no power over me". We could interpret 'ruler of the world' as the power of evil in the world, or simply the darkness of the world that we see and feel, given all the bad things going on. And Jesus declares it has no power over him. This is one of the themes threaded throughout John's gospel. Right in the opening chapter – the 'prologue', of John, we have the words, "The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overtake it". (John 1:5). Later, Jesus himself said "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12).

For us who place our faith in him, this is a great encouragement. Faith in Christ is a victorious faith – *not* in the sense that everything goes well for us, for the journey through life is still like a journey through a dark forest, where evil still affects us, but in the sense that by staying in the light we have hope, and we have guidance and direction for the journey.



(PIXABAY FREE IMAGES)

My third image is that of a small green shoot of a plant growing out of the charred and lifeless earth after a bushfire. It's a familiar image isn't it. Images like this are always heartening because they demonstrate that all is not lost, that the impossible is possible, that amid the darkness and evil there is life and hope, and the chance of regeneration and re-creation.

In our reading today from Revelation today, John, a prophet of God, shares his vision: “And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed me the Holy City, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God. It shone with the glory of God, and its brilliance was like that of a very precious jewel...” (Rev 21:10-11). The whole of Revelation contains descriptions like that.

The common way to interpret Revelation is to read it as apocalyptic literature, relating to end times. And that’s true...in part. But Revelation is not just for the future, it’s for the present. John’s vision speaks about God’s Kingdom, represented symbolically as the renewed city of Jerusalem. It is a vision of God’s Kingdom in the future, but also as it is now in the present. In the last chapter of Revelation, Jesus says he is the “the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end” (Rev 22:13). He always has been and always will be in his creation. That means, now, in our present age.

So, we don’t have to wait for all the bad to be over to see the coming of the Kingdom. It is ever present. And that gives me hope that evidence of that Kingdom is always there to be seen and experienced. Signs of true life are always there, like the green shoot springing up from the blackness. And that gives us something to hold onto. Another way to think of it is that an alternative way of life in this world is always available and it’s a life-giving alternative for those who choose to embrace it.



(PIXABAY FREE IMAGES)

My fourth image is of this small white dove being released from a person’s hands. This image carries a lot of meaning for me. It could be Jesus giving us his gift of his own Spirit.

Our reading from John 14 is part of what’s known as the ‘farewell discourse’ in John, taking place during the last supper, and most of that long discourse (four chapters!) is an encouragement and a comforting reassurance to his followers as the time for his departure was imminent.

It’s in that context that Jesus offers them two things. The gift of his Spirit to be with them after he’s gone (v26) and the gift of his peace (v27a), and we would be right to conclude that *Spirit* and *Peace* are intimately connected. In essence, Jesus was giving them peace in and through the Holy Spirit – a ‘spirit of peace’, as it were, to be their comfort in the midst of all the darkness and evil they will certainly encounter in the future. It’s the same gift he gives us today. A gift of peace. One of the greatest gifts we need to receive. It’s also one of the greatest gifts we can give to our world which desperately yearns for peace.

But what I feel we need to also hear are the next words of Jesus where he says, “I do not give to you as the world gives”. (v27b) That statement really comes alive when we more fully understand the context in which this gospel was written. It was written during the *Pax Romana* – which in Latin means ‘The peace of Rome’. The peace of Roman Empire lasted for some 200 years. That was considered to be a great time of stability, prosperity and freedom from war. But *how* was that kind of peace established? Through force, and violence and dominance, and control. That’s the kind of peace Rome gave them, which wasn’t really peace at all.

The peace Jesus promised them was not one established through forceful control, but like the gentle white dove. A very different kind of peace! And if we carry that peace, we can also share that peace, even if we can’t stop the wars and the human desire to control.



(PHOTO BY R.CROXFORD)

My fifth image is that of a stream in the bush. I took this photo last year on a hike near Mount Buller. It’s the beautiful Delatite River. To me, this is a picture of life. An endlessly flowing stream surrounded by small green ferns and huge gum trees.

In our reading from Revelation 22, as John continues to paint a picture of how God’s world can be, he describes God’s city as having a river flowing down the middle of that city (22:2), a river he calls “the river of the water of life” (v1). The ‘tree of life’ is growing beside that river (v2) and that tree of life ‘bears fruit’ (v2) and brings ‘healing to the nations’ (v2). It’s an image of the abundance, grace, healing and peace flowing endlessly from God, out into a desperate world.

I feel that can be a real encouragement to us today as well. Furthermore, we can be encouraged to know that each of us can not only find life from that river personally, but that we who drink from it actually become the river in our desperate world. We can bear fruit and bring healing in the dark places!

To quote biblical scholar Israel Kamudzandu, “When hope is lost in the world, the church and all believers should be the living stream of flesh, hope and encouragement”. [on slide]



(NASA)

So, I come back to my first image. What is our view of the world? Do we feel sad for the brokenness we see? Yes indeed. I'm sure we all do. And so we *should* feel sad. I'm sure God wants us to feel sad since it must surely reflect his own feelings for a world that he pours all his love into.

So, it's okay to be sad. But it's not okay to give up. Because all is not dark and all is not lost. There is another, alternative view we can and must take. It's a vision of hope and renewal. Let's be the carriers of that hope and renewal, like a river of life, flowing with love into the places of pain and torment. Nothing can stop a river like that. The bad news on our TV's won't stop, but neither will God's love, which can't ever be overcome.