

Yr C Easter 2010

4 April 2010

By The Venerable Susanna Pain

Behind red curtains in the tiny Mesac chapel, on the left hand side of the sanctuary at St Saviours Cathedral in Goulburn, there is a stained glass window.

It tells a story in two parts, on the left is 2 men looking into Jesus' tomb. On the right, there is a woman in red with long curling hair reaching out, and a man standing above her, nail marked hand held up in warning. Under this window these words are written:

'Do not touch me'

'Do not touch me'

These words set me thinking and wondering. Is this the central message of Easter, 'Do not touch me'?

'Stay away, do not get too close' – they imply. I don't like this!

Then I looked closer at the story, at the words ... 'do not touch me', is a mistranslation. 'do not hold on to me' 'do not cling to me' ... might be better.

This gives a different slant 'do not cling onto me', let go a bit, let go of what you thought you knew — maybe I am more than you can grasp.

(trust our transformation moments)

Like a pupae in the cocoon he's in his own vulnerability  
something is happening to him.

He is not sure what it is, but he needs you to let go ...

Beloved Mary in front of him

no, don't touch

don't grasp

'I'm changing!' He is saying 'let me change, like a larvae, wriggling through  
let me change'.

We see the vulnerability of Christ this morning.

He is changing. He is not fully formed. Like the drying of the wings of a butterfly ... shuddering, pumping, uncertainty'. Jesus is transforming — becoming.

So touch lightly. Mary came expecting death, and found, what?

Found herself known and named. 'Mary' he said

'Rabbi', Teacher she responded, and reached out. Mary came expecting death, and found life, found love, found change, found herself, found Jesus – unrecognisable, until she is named.

Do not cling onto the past, let go, let the future unfold expand your understanding of God.

What brings you here today I wonder?

What are you expecting?

Who do you expect to meet? (God? Jesus? Holy Spirit? The Divine? Community? Yourself?)

We live in an increasingly polarised world with aggressive atheism on one hand and conservative fundamentalist religions on the other. Each sparring with the other.

Where do we stand on this spectrum, we who are here this morning? What gives your life and meaning?

Several weeks ago after our Taizé Service here, I asked, ‘what does Easter mean to you?’ the answers were very eclectic. One person identified closely with Good Friday in this suffering world, but could not get a handle on Easter at all. One spoke of Jesus’ resurrection. One said Easter is about transformation. One talked of family gatherings, Easter eggs, shared meals ...

So what is the meaning of this Easter day? Is it that darkness cannot distinguish the light. That death is not the end, that evil that sorrow is transformed into new life. That Christ is risen! ‘Do not touch me, do not cling onto what you think you know.’

It is only in letting go that you can grow. Sue Monk Kidd in her book *The Heart Waits — Spiritual Direction for Life’s Sacred Questions*, uses the metaphor of the caterpillar — chrysalis — butterfly to describe her journey of growth, and transformation — her darkness and questioning, her letting go and waiting, her stillness, and unfurling wings — the Lent, holy week, Easter journey.

At pages 154–155, (*Eastering*), she writes of her experience of the Easter vigil at Grace Episcopal church she says

*as I knelt there the wounds and broken places in my past, the conflict in my present and the questions surrounding my future became an awful throb in my chest. I felt the tensions pull until there was a small crescendo of pain inside me. The darkness closed in. I moved from my knees back onto my seat. My thoughts about Jesus waiting in the tomb for Easter began to blend with the thoughts I’d had during the week about the soul waiting in the womb for new birth. Womb and tomb. .... The darkness of Jesus’ tomb became a place of transformation, a womb, the waiting room of new life. The darkness of death was transformed into a life giving dark.*

Can this happen within us as well? I believe so. She writes.:

*Julian of Norwich wrote that our wounds became the womb... Transformation hinges on our ability to turn our pain (the tomb) into a fertile where life is birthed (the womb) ...*

She continues

*We had reached the point in the service when the Paschal candle is lit as a reminder that the spirit of the darkness of Jesus’ tomb, the radiance of new life is coming, “The light of Christ,” the priest said as he held the fire to the candle the little flamed caught and flickered in the darkness, disappeared, then returned, quivering on and off in a draft of wind. I thought of the line I had written in my journal earlier in the week. “I feel as if a candle has blown out inside me”. The strange synchronicity made my heart beat faster. I did not want that candle to go out. Suddenly the priest lifted his hands and cupped them around the flame. As the light of the candle grew stronger, the sight of him cradling that little speck of fire burned into me. It was an image of bare, unscripted grace: the light of Christ. Throughout the service I gazed at the candles flame ... When I left the church I carried that tiny bit of Easter fire inside me. This*

*fire, which belongs to us all, is nothing less than the pulse of a new life within the soul. That Holy Saturday, I heard God say to me, Cup your hands around it.*

*There's a line from a poem by Gerard Manly Hopkins that speaks to me: 'Let him easter in us, be a day spring to the dimness of us, be a crimson-cresseted east'. Until I read that line it had never occurred to me to think of Easter as a verb. But it is, isn't it? Easter isn't only a long ago event that happened but an action that goes on happily inside us today. To quote 'let him Easter in us' is to let the Christ – life incubate within the darkness of our waiting. The Christ – life is like the Pascal candle spluttering in the darkness. We need gentle hands cupped around it, coaxing the flame to grow stronger.*

*I learnt that in transformation we mustn't run from the darkness but must rather coax the Easter light inside it. I learnt that we turn the darkness of the tomb into the darkness of the womb by cupping our hands around the pulse of True Life and helping it grow. (p 156)*

*One way we coax the life of the new self is by living the questions that inhabit any dark night, by dwelling creatively with the unresolved inside us ... and letting it grow. (p 157)*

Yesterday, around the middle of the day as I walked in the bush amongst native grasses, growing eucalyptus, Patterson's curse and dandelions, I was surprised by butterflies - lots and lots of them – those orange and black ones, white ones, small purple ones ... butterflies everywhere!

These, on Holy Saturday when Jesus is still sealed in the womb tomb, the butterfly is in the dark cocoon, the disciples hiding, locked in an upstairs room afraid, confused, grieving in the darkness of despair. Butterflies everywhere, on Holy Saturday... signs of hope, that in the darkness, is transformation, in the darkness there is light...but I am not ready...I still have more to shed, more to let go...while the change is already happening... and then it is evening, and darkness ...and morning... and I get up early to go to the tomb, with spices to anoint the body expecting death...and finding... what? Through the tears, through the holding on, I see nothing clearly 'Mary'.

He speaks my name and I recognise, he is alive, and I am alive. If I want to hold onto to this but even this is unreal.

'Do not cling to me...

    this is bigger than you  
    bigger than me  
    bigger than us....

Go and tell the others...

    she got up

    she ran.

    'I have seen the Lord' she said...  
    new life, the light burns still  
    community forms  
    the story is repeated  
    again and again and again.

    Butterflies emerge from the chrysalis,

Christ is risen.  
He is risen indeed'

'Behold I make all things new' (Rev)

Today Gina is baptised

she drowns in the waters of death, and is raised up alive.

Transformed, new, her wings still drying, shuddering enfolded in this community

Loved and accepted, waiting for the sun.

Christ is with her on this of all days having walked beside her, loving her.

They continue this journey together and so do we....

Gina might say 'don't gather around me as if I'm a most wise Christian as though the journey is over now.'

Don't squash me,  
I am vulnerable I have just been washed  
Give me space, and honour me

Do not cling

I am changing I am growing

I don't know how I am going to become in this community ... in myself ...

in community compassion.

I am growing,

Transformation is happening.

Christ is risen. He is risen indeed.