

Sermon

Saint Peter's Brighton Beach

Text: Mark 9.30-37

Title: 'A ransom for many'

In 2009, I spent two days a week in the outpatients department of the Peter MacCallum Cancer Hospital, here in East Melbourne. Through conversations with people either living with or affected by cancer, I was learning about the truth, not only of their life situations, but also of my own. In the presence of vulnerable people, I was being made vulnerable. Looking back, I now recall one such conversation, in the middle of which an image came into my mind. I was in a dark prison, being held there by the cords of a whip. When I traced the cord to my own hand, I was able to let go, and be set free.

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Jesus' sermon from Mark this morning, began last week, with Jesus' rhetorical question, 'Who do you say that I am?' To which the answer is later given, 'the Son of Man came not to serve, but to be served, and to give his life, as a ransom for many.'

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In the past couple of weeks we have seen the way in which, the coming of Jesus Christ into the world, was the coming of a new world. In the midst of this old world, the world, in Jesus Christ, has now come. 'If anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation. Everything old has passed away. See, the new life has begun.'

This week we are reminded, once more, that the way into the new world, the way into the new life, is through the historical action of God, in Jesus Christ. Through a past event. The past event, of the death of Christ, as a ransom for many.

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Once we have understood the particularity of the gospel, we may proclaim its universal horizon. The universal horizon, of the entire human race. Of this whole world of individual human beings.

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According to the Apostle Paul, the temporary rejection of Jesus by Israel, which is anticipated in our Gospel this morning, in the disciples' seeking of a this-worldly political Messiah, as well as their own personal seeking of this-worldly political power, meant the expansion of the hope of Israel, beyond Israel, to the human race. This was the breathtaking move of God within history, that many of us are still yet to grasp. God's sending of His own Son into the world, as a ransom for many, has the salvation of the human race, in mind. The particular gospel, has a universal horizon. Jesus is the ransom of the world.

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Salvation has thus been opened up to humanity. But humanity must actively receive it, in order to complete the salvation that God has opened up for it. This we do in the liturgical life of the Christian Church: in celebration of Christian baptism, and in the celebration of the Lord's Supper. These two liturgical actions, which we celebrate here in this place,

are the means by which men and women, boys and girls, receive the salvation of God that was opened up to them by the death of Jesus on the cross. A salvation that does not preserve us from an earthly death. But which preserves us for eternal life, in a fellowship with God, that will survive even death.

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Jesus is the ransom of the world. And by His death on the cross, God has prized open the prison door of human hostility toward him. In baptism we die to self, to our selfish ambition, in order that we might live to God. And by the forgiveness of our more or less open hostility toward God, and by the presence of His Holy Spirit, we receive the gift of salvation, that is eternal life in fellowship with God. A present experience, it is our future hope.

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I remember one day, back in Footscray, being out in the back garden, at this time of year. The ring clasp that is usually attached to the end of the watering system, located at the foot of the nectarine tree, had come off. The water that had once been clamped and built up in a high pressure system, had been released and was now flowing steadily out onto the grass at the base of the tree. I looked at the nectarine tree, that was now blossoming with life.

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The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many. In him, we are forgiven. In him, we are set free. In our dying to our old human nature. And our rising, to our new life, in Christ.