

Easter is a busy time and one that has a long standing narrative around the passion of Jesus. I learnt as a young minister it does not pay to tamper with the well warren narratives of Easter and Christmas during their seasons. People get upset.

Yet I do ask questions and the traditional interpretations do not always work for me so I thank you for indulging me in bringing back an Easter story. The little snippet of Jesus on the cross with his mum and beloved disciple.

Death is an interesting proposition. One as chaplain I recommend that we all give some thought to it. My observations and readings suggest that an interesting process can take place as one approaches death. The act of letting go. Which is the definition of Grief. Grief is letting go. It is not an emotion it is an action.

When it comes around the '3 score years and 20' the cycles of life have a way of preparing us.

When it comes early it can be challenging.

To understand this and what I want to say latter can I am introducing some models that explains the flow of life. And for every model I know there are exceptions. Human diversity being what it is. But I ask you to humor me and let us look at the stages.

The farming one

Development
Consolidation/maintenance
Distribution

The village one

It takes a village to raise a child
It take a village to propel a young person into adulthood
It takes a middle aged person to maintain the structures of a village
And it takes a village to receive an elder

Or my new favorite

To gather
To hold
To let go.

So as I was saying when death comes at a mature age. For most of us a shift has taken place where we more ready to let go. We have learnt that we cannot hold onto everything, we cannot be in control any more. There is a letting go, a realisation that in reality the world is a big place and we may never have been in control. That we are not all powerful, that we are part of something bigger. In the past that was the village, now it is the globe.

However in this story we have a young man dying on a cross. He was in the mist of developing, lurching himself, and gathering from elders and developing a movement around him.

Then he found himself facing his own death

Dying out of the natural rhythms of life and to know it is happening can propel one forward and a wisdom beyond our years can appear. Cancer children can be a great example. They can be miles ahead of their parents in facing their death.

Back to Jesus.

I'll leave it for another occasion to have the intellectual discussion about how aware he was as he entered Jerusalem that it would end with him on a cross.

Clearly at the last supper he knew what awaited him and he gave the symbols of bread and wine to his disciples as a reminder that he was with them into the future. An act of letting go.

He spent time in prayer to God as father in the garden. And I have suggested he spent some time either with his mum or longing for her.

In the reading we have from John he is on the cross. A painful death is a number of hours away. And he would be in considerable discomfort.

And he looks down and he sees two people. His mum and his beloved disciple. Possibly the two most important people in his life.

There is much debate as to who the beloved disciple is. Outside runners included Nicodemus and Lazarus, as in the one raised from death rather than the beggar at the door of the rich man. But the hot money is on John, brother of James, son of Zebedee. So I'm going with John.

So we have Jesus, catapulted as a 33 year old, from rocking the foundations of civilization. Developing his teaching. Implementing it in his living, on the move with energy and drive. Catapulted to a point of letting go. Giving out. Going through the grief of giving away control. And he looks down from the cross.

John. The youngest of his inner group of three disciples. He left his father's fishing boat without hesitation to join Jesus. Strong, young and one hundred percent committed. Hence his being here at the base of the cross.

The young man Jesus had called the son of thunder when he and James offered to deal to the Samaritan village what would not welcome Jesus. A zealous follower of Jesus and loyal, in this case, to a fault. Jesus having to remind him of compassion and understanding and the realisation that people did not change overnight. That the village needed time.

John the son of thunder whose mother showed ambition for him. "How about your get a place at Jesus right hand". His mother want her son's to be important in this new movement that Jesus was igniting. She was a true Mediterranean Mum trying to live her sons life.

Jesus had been a match for her passion, for her sons, with his rebuke and the claim for them to become the last in order to be the first.

From the cross he looks down on John, with the fond memory of their closeness and the trust John had in him. He could also see the potential in this young man. And he could see the bewilderment and the lost little boy.

Jesus, knowing he would not be around to give John the guidance and mentoring. Knowing he could not be a big brother but in front of him was an alternative. Mary. Jesus's mum.

Now it is a truism that many young wives know. A young man worships his Mum. So getting his mum to take on John should be natural.

But Mary does have some Skills to bring to the Job.

She had known hardship as a young pregnant woman in a patriarchal world.

She understood true compassion that she had received from Joseph.

'She knew what it was like to be a refugee in Egypt, to be an outcast dependent of the good will of others.

She knew what it was like to raise a boy like Jesus and the rest of her children. Balancing her love and attention.

Jesus Knew that Mary could support, be there for John in the way she had been there for him. Pushing when needed, like at the wedding in Cana and being there for him, like today, when things are difficult.

Jesus knew John would need someone and Jesus knew Mary would be up to the job.

And so he calls from high on the cross. John - here is your mother, Mum - here is your son.

And so Jesus demonstrates that in death we needed to let go and to hand over. That he had to give up the idea of mentoring John for years to come. There is a grief here. Grief and Love go hand in hand and the grief is enriched with love as he hands over.

Did Mary need John? It has always been taught that in the patriarchal world Mary would need a man. And that Jesus was looking out for her need. But and it is a big BUT. Jesus had brothers. While the original languages are not clear as to the biological nature of Jesus brothers. They were either his blood brothers, or step brothers or close cousin. But there were brothers. And they were supportive. The New Testament indicates that some at least were significant people in the Jerusalem church. So Mary would not have needed John to be the man in her life.

I suggest that Jesus was looking out for John.

John the son of thunder became John the author of the letters of love or at least the founder of the community in which these letters of love came from.

And if the tradition is true, Mary did take on Jesus's suggestion from the cross and stayed with John till her death. Providing that guidance. Being an elder to him. She played a part of transforming the fiery young man into the old man who would say that as long as you have Love that is enough.

In my reading of these few verses I can see the importance of intergenerational relationships.

We live in a society where the generation are turned on each other. In this passage we learn the importance of the generations being together. Jesus had needed his Mum. And he needed Joseph from Arimathea and Nicodemus. Relationships he treasured. Nights drinking wine and eating bread talking about the kingdom of God.

Jesus wanted this for John.

It took a village to raise Jesus.

It took a village to set him free, to find his way following his early start as a carpenter.

Yes the mid aged men and woman tried to contain him, and in doing so diminished what he could do in his home town.

But he did receive form the elders as they let go and encouraged him. Simeon and Anna waiting on his birth. And Nicodemus his sparring partner .

SO what does this mean for us today?

Of great significance is that we need intergenerational relationships.

In securing the relationship between John and his mum Jesus is endorsing the role of eldership. That we need each other.

It takes a village to launch a young person into adult life. That includes the middle ages who give the structure and stability to a village.

And it includes the older who can rise to being elders when called on, as they give of the wisdom of their lives. As they provide a sounding board. As they provide critical insight. As they reflect on their life journey.

And it takes the children, excitedly looking and playing around the edges reminding us that there is a future.

The Capitalist systems of the world have set generation against generation.

Baby boomers are the problem.

Gen Z are self-absorbed.

We play the blame game. And as a result the old do not get to be elders. The young blindly go where they have no insight of the dangers.

I suggest that one of the most important things that Jesus teaches us takes place here on the cross as he sets up an Elder - young person, relationship.

Jesus shows a maturity beyond his years, which is not uncommon among those who face their death at a young age.

SO look around yourself, Who are the people who have the ability to be elders

Young people, look around at those who are older than you and rather than see them as the silent generation or the baby boomers, ask yourself “what have these people got to offer me. What have they learnt in life that I could learn from?

It takes a village.

And we desperately need to form a village again rather than follow the spirit of the age and disintegrate into greater and greater individualization and loneliness. Treating each other as resources for our own gain. The old being Commodities for the retirement industry. The young gullible fodder for the latest marketing campaign.

Play flute

Finish with these words

John, this is your mother, Mum, this is your son. The village goes on.