

REFLECTION 3RD DECEMBER 2023
1ST SUNDAY IN ADVENT
By Rev Dr Fei Taule'ale'ausumai

Some of you know that on my recent holiday in Sydney Australia I was catching up with an “old flame” who lived in Sydney. It was like Advent we both expectant of seeing each other face to face after so many years. It was something to look forward to. But alas, for me it was dead in the water basically from the moment I arrived at the airport. Firstly, he was not obviously waiting for me and I had to facetime to find out if he were there, which he was just not standing where I could see him. He was unshaven and basically it felt like he was my taxi driver. I knew from the get-go that this was not going to work. I was glad that I physically went over to meet with my old flame otherwise we would have continued talking on Facetime building false hopes and dreams for one another. For me there were too many red flags and so I gently let him down. It was good to meet my friend after all these years but we didn't have much in common and we led very different lives. I wasn't sure if it was appropriate for me to share this update but for me it seemed to fit in with the theme of Advent and expectation.

After that time I had a fabulous holiday, I did one thing every day. I went to the Tina Turner musical; fantastic I highly recommend it. I went to the musical Wicked. I went on a bus tour of Blue Mountains and I had an appointment with a Day Spa. I worked around my energy so that I was not in boom or bust mode and did not deplete my energy reserves. I will be doing the same now that I am back. I will do half days in the office. Please feel free to make a time if you wish to see me. I thank you all for your patience and consideration during my time of recovery.

Our New Testament reading seem to highlight similar themes of being on guard and refraining from certain behaviour like excessive drinking and immorality. It even goes as far as separating good as light and bad behaviour as dark. In Samoa when we talk about pre-Christian times it is often referred to as the days of darkness or pogisa or pouliuli. The coming of Christianity is referred to as le Malamalama or the light. Often we refer to negative times or bad times in our lives we talk about the dark days or as the dark night of the soul. The term and metaphysicality of the phrase "dark night of the soul" are taken from the writings of the Spanish poet and Roman Catholic mystic Saint John of the Cross, a Carmelite priest in the 16th century. **Dark Night of the Soul** is a term used to describe a specific phase in a person's spiritual life. It is used as a metaphor to describe the experience of loneliness and desolation in one's life. Though typically associated with a crisis of faith in the Roman Catholic tradition, it is commonly referenced by spiritual traditions throughout the world, and is generally accepted to be a universally inherent aspect of spiritual growth. It is from our experiences of the "dark night of the soul" that we grow and come to realise the full depth, length and height of our faith and ourselves.

The Second Coming of Christ. What is it really about? Many Christians believe it is a literal happening where Jesus will grace us with his physical presence? In Sir Lloyd Geering's booklet "Who owns the Holy Land" in the section Planning for Christ's Second Coming he says "The Jews' Society, along with all evangelical Christians, encouraged the return of Jews to the Holy Land and had an ulterior motive for doing so. They saw it as the divinely planned forerunner of the Secon Coming of Christ. They arrive at this conviction from their interpretation of the Bible, or what they called biblical prophecy." (pg.35)

The delayed Parousia the coming of the Holy Spirit in the book of Acts chapter 2 was an internalising of Jesus second coming of Jesus because for the followers of Jesus at the time it didn't happen.

I remember when my dad was very, very sick and mum and dad had a visit from their son-in-laws brother and his Jehovah witness mates. They had come to have morning tea with dad. Had my dad been well, there is absolutely no way he would have let them into his house. Sometimes when he was watering his garden and mormons or JW's tried to talk to him he would accidentally send the water in their direction. But anyway, here they were sitting with him, dad vulnerable unable to talk just lying there listening. In walks "Moi." It looked like one was about to choke on their scone for they had not expected me the minister and theologian to join their tea party. I sat down and said hi and joined them for morning tea, then I began to talk to them instead. I said, "you know I really admire your zeal and commitment to evangelism, walking the streets, knocking on doors, putting up with all sorts of rejection as well as some positive experiences and blessings too. What I really admire about your work is that you do this daily knowing that even you might not be part of that 144,000 people chosen at the rapture. There are only 144,000 people who will be given life after death and even knowing this you still try to recruit more people. They just looked at me because I said it all so nicely. Thank goodness that I believe in a God of grace and love and peace, and that God's love, peace and grace is unconditional.

Isaiah talks about that everlasting peace, "He will settle disputes among great nations, they will hammer their swords into ploughs and their spears into pruning knives. Nations will never again go to war, never prepare for

battle again. Now, descendants of Jacob, let us walk in the light which the Lord gives us!." The promise of Isaiah continues to offer us hope even in 2023 when we consider our world at war today between Ukraine and Russia, Israel and Palestine and world history over the last decade.

Isaiah who could envision a different reality, who could hope for a time when Israel would be faithful and allow God to be God. Israel was weary of war and threat, weary of the divisions that had torn her country apart after Solomon, weary of the instability of a world in which power and the oppression that it brings were the controlling factors in the world. Some like Isaiah knew that God's vision of the world was much different. They knew that the God they served was the same God who had heard the cries of oppressed slaves in Egypt and entered history to relieve their oppression. And they knew that because God was such a God, he would not forever tolerate oppression in the world.

And so they hoped. And they dreamed. They dreamed of a time when God would enter the world and bring an end to war and suffering, when God would establish God's reign on earth and restore all creation to what God intended it to be. They dreamed of a time when the division that had torn their people apart might be healed, and they could once again be a whole people under God. They dreamed of a time when "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." At yet the irony is that was also the very oppression that the Palestinians cried out for decades to be freed from the occupied Gaza strip. Was this a justifiable occupation? Again, according to Sir Lloyd, "for the Palestinians in the Gaza Strip, it was worst of all. During the 20 years the Gaza Strip was under Egyptian control (1948-67), it remained little more than a reservation for refugees, where Egyptian rule was brutal and repressive. The Gaza

Strip, which is only 25 miles long and four to five miles wide, became one of the most densely populated areas of the world. Poverty, unemployment and social misery became characteristic of life in the region. According to Yeshayahu Leibowitz a Jewish philosopher in Israel having refused the highest awards of Jewry could offer him before he died posed the question in relation to the Jewish treatment of the Palestinians in occupied Gaza. "Who will want to be known as a Jew in 100 years, unless we stop doing to another people what was done to us?"

For most of world we are tired of a world at war, there is a deep cry of a people for Peace. "Neither shall they learn war anymore." That the 4 days of ceasefire turned into 6 days. But sadly the truce is over and fighting has again begun.

Traditionally it was thought of as a particular point of time in the future when God would intervene in history. Associated with it were hopes of deliverance, vindication, and the opposite: judgement. The Prophet Amos attacked those who looked to it for their consolation while not addressing their injustices in the present and warned that the day of the Lord would be far from good news for them. There is no question that this is part of the vision of Isaiah. Maybe we have depended a little too much on God transforming our spears and swords while we are still swinging them, instead of laying them down long enough to start making a few plowshares.

The watching is a dramatic way of speaking about God-connectedness. It is not very edifying if it is reduced to an exhortation not to misbehave in case you get 'caught with your hand in the cookie jar, as they say, when Jesus comes. It is about developing an awareness of what the God of the future is saying and doing in the present, to take a God perspective on the issues of the day and the future and to let that happen at all levels of our

reality, from our personal lives to our international community, including our co-reality in creation. It is a stance nourished by the eucharistic vision of hope. It is taking the eucharistic table into the community, into the present, and letting it watch us and keep us awake to what is happening.

During Advent, the recollection of the waiting of Mary reminds the church that the crisis of Jesus' birth was anticipated by only a few and understood by no one. Only God knows what time approaches. As the people of God wait even now, they can anticipate only that the times are in God's hands and not our own. We know that God will not leave us alone, that God will not leave us without hope. Amen.