

FEBRUARY 14, 2016

VALENTINE'S DAY

ELDERS

MARK HERRMANN & RENATE WEBER

Welcome slide

Prelude: *Love* by John Lennon

Renate

Welcome to you all this afternoon. I could say “have we got a show for you” if I was a TV host for Templer Talent! Our Service today will be presented by a number of people. Mark and I will share the Service presentation along with contributions, musical and other, from the Glenk family.

We have chosen to use the text for the day which is the Wedding in Cana. Mark will talk about that. During my preparation I realised that today is Valentine's Day, so happy Valentine's day to you all. There is a heart for each of you to enjoy. The heart is the symbol of love and so my thoughts went to children's stories which were about love.

One of my favourite books is *Guess how much I love you* by Sam McBratney, illustrated by Anita Jeram; a delightful story which I often give as a gift. I even gave my husband a popup copy for his last Easter as I was away in Japan.

Show the two slides from the book.

“Sometimes when you love someone very, very much you want to find a way of describing how great your feelings are. But as Little Nutbrown

Hare and Big Nutbrown Hare discover love in not an easy thing to measure.”

In this story father and son “compete” to see who loves the other the most.

We all have people we really love deeply and dearly. It is such a difficult concept to quantify, so this little book gives us measures we can use. (I also thought Big Nutbrown Hare could have let Little Nutbrown Hare have the last word, when he said “I love you right up to the MOON”, but Big Nutbrown Hare trumped him with the final line “I love you to right up to the moon AND BACK!”)

We will sing Hymn 63: Love is not merely a word (all three verses)

Our next Hymn is sung to the tune of *Amazing Grace* but has different words. Mark found these during his research into the text. It is called *Amazing Love*. Words on screen

Alex Glenk will sing the first verse and then we will join in with him for the other 6 verses.

“Amazing Love” (Sung to ‘Amazing Grace’) M Rolfe

Amazing love that Jesus told,
Two thousand years ago,
A story new, a story old,
A love we all can know.

He spoke to crowds in Palestine,
He speaks to us today,
He tells us all of love divine,
To us he shows the way

The realm of God is one of love,
Of justice and of peace.
It's not about a realm above –
Through love this world release.

What we want done to us, can be
The rule by which we live;
To follow it will make us free
To share, to love, to give.

The story comes to challenge us,
It's not the easy road,
For us to love, as Jesus loved,
To bear another's load.

The realm of God is here with us
When love and peace we share,
Although we fail, we know God's grace,
It's love that helps us there.

Amazing love that Jesus told,
Two thousand years ago,
A story new, a story old,
A love for all to know.

Renate

On Screen

Amazing love that Jesus told,
Two thousand years ago,
A story new, a story old,
A love we all can know.

We know that Jesus spread a message of love.
A story new, a story old, a love we all can know.

It is not easy showing that amazing love. I know I have to pull myself up sometimes when I see the external persona, rather than the person within. We are all human beings deserving of love and respect, no matter what colour our skin or what clothes we wear.

He spoke to crowds in Palestine,
He speaks to us today,
He tells us all of love divine,
To us he shows the way.

What a prophetic verse for Templers. Our forefathers went to Palestine to feel a stronger link to Jesus. They wanted a more direct connection to the Bible and the Jesus message as they interpreted it, rather than have the indoctrination or interpretations of the Roman Catholic Church. It is why, as an Elder, I research each text we are given from the Bible, to see what message we can apply to our lives today.

The realm of God is one of love,
Of justice and of peace.
It's not about a realm above –
Through love this world release.

Many Nations have a faith, a God they believe in. When we teach the confirmands about religion and God, they usually realise that the common thread of all religious thought is based on love. We all want love, justice and peace here on earth. I watch the news each morning as the tragedy in Syria is reported. Forty million Syrians are fleeing their land, their homes stand in rubble; many have the clothes on their back and a plastic bag of belongings. The world is rallying to help. They need our love, they deserve justice and peace, but there is also fear that some unscrupulous people with ulterior motives will use the disguise of being a refugee to cause harm to the country that offered them shelter, that major Nations are playing a game of supremacy, just like The

Story of Little Nutbrown Hare, but with human consequences! If we are truly Christlike, Christian, then we must do all we can to help our fellow man. It is here and now, today, in Bayswater that we need to follow our motto. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have a just, peaceful, loving world! It may need to be achieved, one small step at a time.

What we want done to us, can be
The rule by which we live;
To follow it will make us free
To share, to love, to give.

This verse reflects Jesus' prime message: love your neighbour as yourself. Treat others as you would like to be treated. We were aliens in a foreign land for a number of generations. We ate strange foods, we dressed differently, our parents spoke another language at home, often with an accent. We survived and assimilated (some might say too well), now is the time we need to reach out the hand of love and friendship, to share some of our bounty with those who have lost everything.

The story comes to challenge us,
It's not the easy road,
For us to love, as Jesus loved,
To bear another's load.

We know that Jesus faced many challenges and, at times, appeared to waiver but always he did the right thing. He was a man of the people; he lived life as a man and was able to set us an example of universal love, human decency and respect. He makes us think about our actions, if we are free from blame (sin) then we can cast the first stone. "Love one another; as I have loved you" (John 13:34). He expected that the practice of this love by His obedient people would be so distinctive to a watching world that He said, "All will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (Verse 35)

The realm of God is here with us
When love and peace we share,
Although we fail, we know God's grace,
It's love that helps us there.

I recently sent a message of sympathy, love, support and the offer of a prayer to a friend who had lost a son-in-law at 44, leaving a widow (my friend's daughter) alone with two young children aged 7 and 5. He was aching for his daughter's loss and shot back a vengeful reply: "How can a loving God take a father and husband?" I was stung a little by the note and wanted to send back a reply retorting it wasn't God that caused the massive heart attack, but maybe the man's actions in life, but I refrained. We need to share the love, especially when someone is hurting, but we should also share the love in our daily lives. Smile at people, help others with small acts of kindness and treat each other with respect in all our undertakings. Maybe we need to be quicker to forgive, ourselves as well as others.

Valentine slide

I mentioned at the start, today is Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day has a religious history. St Valentine was a Roman Priest at a time when there was an emperor called Claudius, who proclaimed an edict that prohibited the marriage of young people. This was based on the hypothesis that unmarried soldiers fought better than married soldiers because married soldiers could be afraid of what might happen to them or their wives or families if they died.

Valentine lived in a permissive society where polygamy was popular. And yet some young people seemed to be attracted to Christian faith. The church thought that marriage was very sacred, between one man and one woman for their life and that it was to be encouraged, so Valentine secretly married couples who wanted a Christian

wedding. He was eventually caught, imprisoned and tortured for performing marriage ceremonies against the command of Emperor Claudius the second. There is a legend that Valentine prayed with and healed jailer Asterius' blind daughter. Asterius himself became Christian as a result of this miracle.

When, in the year 269 AD, Valentine was sentenced to death because of his stand for Christian marriage, it is told the last words he wrote were in a note to Asterius' daughter. He inspired today's romantic missives by signing it, "From your Valentine."

Valentine laid down his life for what he believed. He has become known as the patron saint of lovers. My confirmation and marriage text was, "God is love and he who dwells in love dwells in God and God in him." Marriage, indeed life, needs to be worked on; it is not always easy. Now I will hand over to Mark.

Mark

Bible text – John Chapter 2: 1-11 (read by Rolf Glenk)

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. ³ When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine."

⁴ "Woman, [a] why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come."

⁵ His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

⁶ Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding about 100 litres.

⁷ Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim.

⁸ Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet."

They did so, ⁹ and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realise where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside ¹⁰ and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now."

¹¹ What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Mark

Footnote to Bible text:

John 2:4 The Greek for Woman does not denote any disrespect.

Cana was very close to Nazareth in Galilee where Jesus grew up.

The transformation of water into wine at the wedding is the first miracle (or sign) attributed to Jesus in the Gospel of John. One text commentary I read suggests there are, in effect, two miracles at play here. The first is the changing from water to wine, while the second is accomplishing this in a way that was not apparent to everyone.

I don't believe that Jesus was physically able to turn water into wine. Being used for ceremonial washing, the jugs could only have had some leftover water in the bottom of them. So, one can't say that they contained dregs of wine that may have given a taste of wine when filled with water.

And, even if they did, certainly not the best wine of the wedding.

When the Bible speaks of a vine it is referring to a grapevine, and there is only one thing in the world with the ability to turn water into wine and that is, indeed, a grapevine.

In the vineyard, a literal grapevine takes water from beneath the ground and, as the water goes up the vine, it is transformed. It then spreads out into the branches and they burst forth with the fruit. When the grapes are cared for and aged properly, they are used to make wine. But I cannot see Jesus as a literal grapevine. I can better relate to him as a man, divinely inspired. He taught us and showed us by his example the essential guidelines we should use for our lives.

Another Bible commentary asks, “Is it possible that Jesus, as the true spiritual vine within us, acts in the exact same way as a literal vine?”

The commentary continues: “This is the nature of symbolism; using things of a material nature to describe things of a spiritual nature. As our spirit (the water) is filtered through the Christ consciousness (the vine), it flows through the branches (us) and we are able to put forth the true fruit. In this case that fruit is the grapes, which represents the love we carry and also the divine wisdom and value that we have learned through the pruning of our dead branches (acts that are not ‘fruitful’ or helpful to us or others). When we give our thoughts and meditations (ageing the grapes) to the true nature of the things we’ve learned, they become like fine wine, which is the divine wisdom and love within us. It is this wine that we ourselves drink and also pour into the souls of others, and a little wine makes the heart (the soul) merry.”

Does that resonate with us more?

Paradoxically, one internet writer says the Bible verses do not relate to a wedding at all, instead pointing out references that he ascribes to Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection.

On the third day a wedding took place...

The third day is a reference to the resurrection. Big things tend to happen in the Gospels (and the Bible more generally) on the third day.

Jesus replied. “My hour has not yet come.”

As part of the symbolic layering of the Gospel are constant references to time – in hours. All of which lead up to “the hour” or “my hour” which is the crucifixion.

The writer delves further thus:

In John Chapter 19, after the death of Jesus, one of the soldiers pierced his side with a spear, and at once blood and water came out.

Water and blood, wine-red blood, concluding that the “water turned to wine” in the story of the wedding is not water and wine at all, but the blood of Jesus.

I guess this illustrates that you can read almost whatever you want into a text.

What then can we take from the story?

It can be a marker for the beginnings of Jesus’ ministry. He indicates that his time has not yet come, suggesting he is reluctant to react to the situation. A wedding, then as now, is a joyous occasion as family and friends gather to rejoice in the couple’s shared love and to wish them well for their future life together. Although I don’t like the taste of alcohol, I concede that a celebration of this type deserves wine.

John describes Jesus' actions as a sign of what he has come to do – to transform the lives of all who will believe in him.

If there was a transformation in our story, I'd rather focus on the transformations of people, their attitudes, their characters and their behaviours.

It is common to see statistics on the re-offending rates of criminals, and the high percentage of released prisoners returning to jail after a relatively short period of freedom. Why is that?

Is it because such people find it difficult to change or improve the key securities of their lives... a place to live, food on the table, employment, support and self-belief? If so, then their period of incarceration has taught them little. What does that say about the rehabilitative measures of our justice system?

Is there insufficient incentive or challenge or reward in living and working outside a prison environment? How depressing.

A crime is committed and the guilty party serves time, but is often incapable of avoiding or unwilling to avoid a repeat of the sequence of factors that caused the problem. I don't profess to know or understand the thinking of someone in such a position.

Sometimes a life-transforming event can be associated with an individual or family taking enormous risks to flee a desperate situation. Think of instances of domestic violence. Think of the Syrian refugees and the civil war happening in their country.

There are asylum seekers who come to our country. We offer them protection, but at what cost? Many have decided that anywhere is a better place than where they have come from, yet how

do we treat them?

A letter to The Age earlier this week expressed it as follows:

“Australia has created its own hearts of darkness on Nauru and Manus Island on the spurious basis that our ‘deterrent’ policies serve to reduce loss of life at sea when, on the contrary, they are likely to endanger more lives through turning back boats, forcing refugees to stay in war zones or detention camps with conditions that will kill them even more surely than the waves.

“The astonishing indifference of the Labor and Liberal senators in voting against a Greens’ senate motion for amnesty for the threatened 267 asylum seekers (over a third of whom are children and include 37 babies) shows the continued heartlessness of our major parties, more concerned about fanning public fears and misconceptions than showing basic humanity and decency.”

Can we take the politics out of it? What about focusing on basic humanity and decency?

Life-changing incidents – whether forced by others or self-imposed – are a strong test of character. One successful experiment with a positive message involves a program to settle Karen-Burmese refugees at Nhill, in western Victoria (half-way between Melbourne and Adelaide).

This is emerging as a model not only for refugee settlement but also for the revival of struggling rural towns. About 150 refugees have been settled, attracted by jobs being offered by a local poultry producer (Luv a Duck). Local leaders say the arrival of the Karen has breathed new life into the town, bringing economic benefits and enriching its cultural life.

Many of the refugees spent years living in tents in United Nations refugee camps on the Thai-Burma border after the Burmese Government burnt their villages. The Government has persecuted the Karen hill-tribe people since 1949 and there are an estimated 150,000 Karen living in camps.

For all of the Karen of Nhill, it has been an incredible and unlikely journey from the rain-drenched jungles of South-East Asia to the broad wheat fields and silos of the Wimmera.

The settlement program was effectively begun by John Millington OAM in 2009. With a lack of local labour, he turned to settlement agency AMES (Adult Multicultural Education Services) to see whether there were any refugees willing to relocate to Nhill.

Now there are more than 50 Karen working for the local poultry producer and on farms servicing it. “We learnt very quickly that it was important that the partners and kids of the workers were involved. We knew that they had to be looked after, engaged and connected to the community or the whole thing would fall over,” Mr Millington said.

There were, however, cultural obstacles to overcome, including a fear of persecution by the authorities. Mr Millington said, “I had showed them a map of where Nhill was and told them it was ‘near the border’ – meaning the border with South Australia. They were worried because they thought I meant the Thai border.”

He was worried about what the locals would think about them bringing a group of Asians to town, so all the community leaders as well as the police, the mayor and the local clergy were brought together. Assurances were given that the Karen would only get jobs that could not be filled by locals. The Karen were accepted and everyone was very welcoming.

A mentoring program was set up through the local neighbourhood house. “People bent over backwards to help and we had 15 or 20 volunteers in no time. We were very fortunate that this community was prepared to help them,” he said.

The Shire’s Chief Executive Tony Doyle says Nhill has been enriched economically and culturally by the Karen. “The social impact has been extraordinary but to see the way the community has opened their hearts and minds has broadened everyone’s thinking. We are all enriched because of the exposure to another culture and it has made Nhill a better place to live,” Mr Doyle said.

(AMES Australia - Compelling news from the refugee and migrant sector – 17/02/2014)

Life presents us with choices, and how we respond to them shapes us as humans. In striving for the Kingdom of God on earth – involving a continuing perfecting of humanity and a closer relationship of people to God and to each other through love – we are asked to transform ourselves, to change our behaviours and attitudes towards others.

Is this something we conscientiously think of and try to do, or is it easier to focus on the other person and wish that they would do something about their behaviour and attitude?

Our sister community in Degerloch (Germany) has offered a housing opportunity to the Stuttgart authorities for rental occupancy by refugees. Since mid-October, a Christian Iraqi couple has taken up residence in one of the TGD apartments in Felix Dahn Straße. For two years previously the couple was in accommodation for asylum seekers, and they are now glad to have their own living space. The city has equipped them with the essentials and the Templer community has pitched in with other items. I think this is absolutely wonderful!

Prayer (stay seated)

Let us take a moment to settle into the silence.

(Silence)

As we sit in the quiet, feel the life that stretches between us, filling this place.

Feel the opening of all the windows of our beings, as we reach outward to the life around us, beyond this place, throughout all creation.

(Silence)

In silence now, we bring to our minds' eye the people who have loved us and continue to love us: people who are not here with us today, but whose love we carry with us... people who are there every day, and whose care and love we sometimes take for granted... people who might be within our circle of love, could we but extend our circle a little further...

In silence now, we hold these people in our hearts.

(Silence)

May our hearts be opened to all whose names and faces have crossed our minds: that old wounds may be healed, that constant joys may be celebrated, and that the love we share with the people in our lives may be our abiding teacher.

May this be our prayer.

Amen

Collection to Red Cross to support the Syrian refugees

Postlude: Alex and Sonia Glenk singing *The Sound of Music*