

Easter Message

As we cross over from Lent to Easter. We reflect on the promises we made throughout Lent and the purposes they've achieved.

Easter is a time of reflection and renewal. Easter is a time of thankfulness and gratitude. Let us use this time to reflect on our many blessings and be thankful.

In this season of rebirth, may you feel your faith renewed and your heart made new with the hope that Easter brings.

Wishing everyone a Blessed and Holy Easter.

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Easter Reflection

It had been some years since the children from our Etina Havea Kindergarten could participate in college worship to commemorate this year's Ash Wednesday and mark the beginning of Lent season. The recurring phrase, "remember you are dust and to dust you shall return," echoed throughout the chapel as all were reminded of our inner fragility as humans. It was perhaps a first for some of the children, bright-eyed and excited to participate alongside their parents. And while the call to repentance or the ensuing 40-day journey of devotion and sacrifice may not have resonated with them, the chaplain was quick to fill the blanks using the concept of stardust.

Drawing attention to the universe and the intergalactic activities that produced and reproduced stars including Earth, our children were encouraged to view Lent as a season to shine as they too, were created from the stuff of stars. For adults coming from church traditions that do not observe Ash Wednesday, it was likely the first time they had also heard of stardust during a Lent service. It was a refreshing take not only because it offered a more optimistic premise for Lent, but also because it conveyed a scientific as well as Pasifika view of human life as having cosmological roots.

A Radical Return

The belief that human beings were created from earthly matter has parallels in both the Christian account of creation (Gen 2:7) and many creation narratives in Pasifika cultures, albeit with variations on the types of matter. The sounded return to dust, therefore, was less a reminder of our shortcomings than it was a radical invitation to return to our roots within creation—where the whole of life, including God's, are not isolated realities. This view is founded on the premise that knowledge of the Creator was only made possible through creation.

It is a radical return not because it pushes the boundary of Christian orthodoxy but because it connotes going back to the beginning, or the source, as implied in the Latin *radix*. From this perspective, being

radical is not about seeking extraordinary ways to demonstrate one's devotion but to find meaningful ways to locate God in the world around us. For subsistence communities that live closely with land, the return to dust is neither a choice nor distant memory, but a lived reality. The same could also be said for rural and agrarian communities that continue to cook with stones and depend on soil for food.

Even so, these societies quickly discovered during the lockdowns of the recent COVID-19 pandemic that they had slowly lost touch with their connection to the cosmic world. Overcome by widespread anxiety, many across the globe felt they had lost control when in fact it was our sense of connectedness that was lost. As people were forced to remain indoors to teach, conduct business, attend to their families, plantations and so forth, it was our innermost ability to connect that was most needed, yet found most wanting. The global increase in divorce and domestic violence, for instance, demonstrated this deficiency.

The talk of "return" thus generated two strong positions. The first recognised the need to reprioritise nature and our ecological responsibilities. Although it was not by choice, it was radical nonetheless as the cease in human production brought benefits for the environment and its wildlife. The second was more of a counter-declaration by politicians and religious leaders saying that there would be no returning to the 'last normal.' Of course, with the benefit of hindsight, it is worth asking ourselves which of the return paths our leaders have taken and whether it is the right one.

Tombs of Mediocrity

One would assume from our shared vulnerabilities during the pandemic that we had learnt never to take the little things for granted. But with the reopening of schools, public worship places and businesses, the temptation to forget has once again taken hold. During Easter last year members of our ecumenical community were asked to remember the victims of forsakenness produced by war, famine, climate injustice and violence of all kinds. The call to remember, as Jesus uttered to his disciples (Lk 22:19), was infused with the hope that God's unreserved grace moves us to action. This year it is worth assessing how far we have actually come. Did we learn from the mistakes of yesteryears? Or has convenience taken us back to complacency?

Over two thousand years ago Jesus' followers were confronted with an empty tomb and yet many still missed the invitation to step in and become witnesses. This inaction has caused us to miss the triumph of life over death taking for granted the profound act of love where the immovable Divine intentionally stepped into our suffering world. In refusing to acknowledge the in-breaking of God's reign, many today, like neoliberal capitalists, continue to reduce life to mere commodities and hence, misplace the living among the dead (Lk 24:5). We see this in the way Christians have casually resumed business as usual speaking only of God's passion in passing. Like persons dragging their feet on the path to Emmaus (Lk 24:13-25), we encounter the Risen Lord only in worship liturgies.

This haphazard approach to faith has succeeded in creating tombs of mediocrity turning potential activists into mere benchwarmers. In the world of the mediocre, being idle becomes the new idol. It is the very comfort food that breeds forgetfulness. Instead of becoming living witnesses of Easter, churches and governments have become content with stones not being rolled away. We prefer not to rock the boat or change our current paths. We are okay with just going through the motions of Holy Week as an annual event that comes with scheduled public holidays. This forgetfulness has not only

downplayed the traumatic events that turned palm-waving supporters into jurors of death, but also the transformative effects of our participation in the resurrection.

Stepping out as Risen Communities

As Easter communities, we look to the future with the hope of not only stepping out of, but also rising up from, the political, ecological, and religious tombs we have created. Taking our cues from the Cross, where God demonstrated in no average way the kind of solidarity needed in today's suffering world, we speak up against injustice as living proof that our God is not a God of mediocrity. Based on the current rate of extinction and the ongoing destruction of other ecosystems, we must acknowledge that the message of new life cannot fully materialise until all of God's creatures have equal access.

Risen communities, therefore, are communities of change. They are fishers and farmers calling for a radical transformation of our current thinking around natural resources and the lop-sided views around food security. They are elders and educators, envisioning the world that our descendants will inherit after our extractive industries and our nuclear weapons have run their course. They are preachers and parishioners' hand in hand, resisting what is convenient and the tempting return to mediocrity. This task to radiate hope in a world of despair and justice for the downtrodden is not for the faint hearted. It is the stuff of stars called to stand out and not blend in; to be living disciples and not mere observers; to be prophetic in the face of adversity; to be communities of life in all its forms.

This Easter we from the Pacific Theological College wish you all life and life in abundance!

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