**Sunday 7th August 2022, Pentecost 9, Peace Sunday**

**I see, I wonder, I understand!**

**Rev David Coster**

One of the things that I made sure of when I retired was to absent myself from the decision-making processes of the Church. I do not attend Presbytery gatherings and I don’t vote there, even though, while I serve here at Cashmere, I am able to. My reason for this is that I hold the opinion that the future of the Church and the life of the Church rests with those who have to implement the decisions as well as live with the consequences. I have had nearly 50 years of agreeing and disagreeing with the decisions of General Assembly and Presbytery. In my retirement I leave the angst to others.

Another reason I do this is that as Ministers we can often believe that the lessons and experience, we gained in ministry still applies as much today as it did then.

I was reading of a young Minister in their first parish talking with an older, retired minister. She shared her conversion experience and her hopeful plans for the church-her excitement for the future. The older Minister sighed, shook his head and said, “Oh yes. The early enthusiasm. You’ll get over it.”

How different to an older Minister who was speaking to younger ministers about what we used to call the Quinquennial Visitation when he said, “Remember, congregations are not called to be successful, but to be faithful.” The measure of a church is not its size, or its splendour, but its faith.

There is always a danger for religious leaders and congregations to seek popular success, and perhaps place a higher value on this, rather than faith. We do well to remind ourselves that our faithfulness is not measured by numbers attending worship, nor its enjoyment, nor our ability to pay our way. Though if we are faithful these things might follow.

All of our readings for today focus on what it is to be faithful – faithful even in the face of adversity and the risk of social ostracism.

I would like to look at these readings today through the eyes of John 20 where three Greek words are used to reflect three different levels of seeing. The first is *blepo* I see; the seond is, *theoreo,* I wonder, and the final one is, *horao,* I understand.

I see tends to be what we observe and often is associated with the facts of the matter.

Curiosity is the second level of seeing- we could call this wondering. What is it in what we are seeing that arouses our curiosity?

The final level is “I understand” or we could say, “I get it now. This is about making connections between the biblical text, experiences, self, values, wisdom and God. It looks for the penny to drop, for things to fall into place, the fog to life and clarity to dawn. This is the time in our lives when what we observe, transforms from being curiosity and wondering into action.

Isaiah was a keen observer of what was happening in his lifetime. He watched and responded with words that were highly critical and often sharp. Likening his people to those inhospitable cities of Sodom and Gomorrah, Isaiah condemned the people’s love of spectacle, futile offerings, solemn assemblies and appointed festivals. Isaiah warned his listeners that God would not listen to their prayers, especially those with blood on their hands. Isaiah opposed imperial power and the accumulation of wealth. He demanded repentance and right action, challenging the arrogance and greed of the powerful.

**I see:** that without right faith our rituals and offerings are of little worth.

**I wonder:** Whether without a vision of peace and reconciliation, we lose our way, lose our hope and become distant from God.

**I understand and get it**: the fierce demands of faith which call us to change our outlook and lifestyle – to not focus on self interest and investment but to focus on the well being and peace of all humanity.

Our Luke reading builds on the previous passage to show the care and concern Jesus has for “the little flock”. Jesus directs his listeners to focus on the well-being of the community rather than on material things or themselves. Sharing resources with those most in needs anticipates the kinship or kingdom of God.

Loving service to others in need is one of the cornerstones of the Christian ministry.

**I see:** Do not be afraid: your heavenly Father is giving you the kingdom. Where your treasure is, there is your heart.

**I wonder:** What do I treasure? Where is my treasure? What is it like to be caught sleeping? What does it feel like to miss the moment?

**Ah I understand and get it:** Spiritual living is being alert to the moment, moving in the flow, being constantly ready to respond to God’s call on my life – to stand in awe of the Holy.

What is it for us to see, to wonder and to understand as we look at the world and the many issues confronting us, our way of life and values to day. No matter which country we may live in; no matter whether we sit on the left, centre or right of the political spectrum; no matter whether we are communist, socialist, capitalist or whatever; no matter the colour of our skin or the language we speak, we all share this one world as our home. Our cultural perspective does influence our world view for it provides us with our assumption – religious, or secular; and our personal and social agenda.

I remember when my brother Ray and I were at university and we came back home to Winton for the holidays. Our minds had been opened by our University Education. We had been taught to think, to question and to gain a much broader perspective than our mother, who had lived in Winton and its surrounds all her life. She was talking with her twin sister and said to her, “I don’t know what that University education is doing to the boys but it has addled their brains.” Mum’s view of the world had been conditioned by war, by economic depression, by living in a farming community, by not having a secondary education-which was common in people of her age. Her perspective was challenged by Ray and my perspective. She had difficulty with that – proud as she was of her sons.

Can we gain a godly or holy perspective on our life and the life of the world?

This world which God, the Creator loves, and to which he sent Jesus that we may have life in all its fullness.

Do we see, do we wonder, do we understand?

To God be the glory. Amen