

*Sermon preached by rev Rachel McDougall*

*St Paul's Canterbury*

*Epiphany 3A & Australia Day*

*Sunday 26<sup>th</sup> January 2020*

*Changing Direction for the dawning of light*

Years ago I was on a liturgy tour in Germany and we were heading for a monastery and the bus driver got lost.

You could hear him swearing up the front, getting more worried as we ended up a dead-end lane in a village. Thank God for Google Maps!

Whilst people were arguing on the bus I'd found where we were and I offered to help the driver with my very limited German.

At the same time two of the leaders were fighting with each other about what to do and whose responsibility it was to find the way ahead. So my first offer was rejected.

But when the bus driver had got out of the dead end and then managed to drive to a top of the hill on a deserted track near a farm they took up my offer.

So thanks to Google we turned around and finally found the right turn to the monastery we were looking for – a beautiful place, where we went to one of the sung offices and later heard how the beginning of renewal for the Catholic church and it's liturgy had begun in the downstairs chapel.

Changing direction can be fraught with anxiety as sometimes it takes a while even to realise that you are lost!

Or even to admit the need to find a different way, particularly when everyone is anxious or when circumstances are difficult.

So it was for Jesus. In the face of hearing that John the Baptist was arrested Jesus withdraws to Galilee.

To withdraw might be seen as giving up or retreating from the field, paralysed by what is happening to John and what it might mean for him.

Instead he changes direction and moves on away from Galilee.

He chooses not to directly confront the powers that be directly with violence but begins his ministry by going his own way, opening a new way.

He goes to Capernaum near the Lake, which was surrounded by green – such a different starting point to John the Baptist. He doesn't start his ministry with people in the desert waiting for people to come out to him. Instead he moves to where people are and seeks people out.

A light is dawning as a new way is being opened up as he cries out 'Repent the kingdom of heaven has come near'.

This is no message about sorrow and bewailing but an invitation to change direction to a new way of life.

To repent - Metanoia is about changing habits and changing thinking, finding a new way ahead.

Changing direction is to realise and embrace what is growing within you – that God's presence is within and invites you to a new way of life that is happening now.

Despite what the occupying powers might be doing, or the arrest of the forerunner John the Baptist, new life is happening now.

No matter that this could have hung heavily over Jesus about what is ahead of him, Jesus instead is on the move inviting change.

Change direction is an invitation to change our hearts and minds and learn what it means to live a healthier and more human life.

Jesus' own change of direction is not just for him to do on his own. It prompts him to call others to share the way with him.

There is something so compelling in Jesus' presence and in his call that both sets of brothers leave everything behind and follow him.

Jesus is revealed as the one through whom new light is dawning, the light that is also for us.

Today we celebrate Australia Day. As our collect says our land is a land of such contrasts – of drought and rain, and hail and fires – all of which we've seen even in the last week.

The day itself is full of contrasts – some see as a day to celebrate all the blessings we have in this great country and the diversity of its peoples. There is much to give thanks for.

For others particularly our indigenous people, it is a day to mourn as it symbolizes the reconciliation that is far from complete.

It is also hard to celebrate in the midst of the bushfire disaster with the loss of lives and properties and animals and animal habitat. And the dawning realisation that climate change is here.

We have heavy hearts to see the suffering of animals and human beings alike, and the amount of land consumed.

At the same time we are uplifted by the heroic acts of firefighters.

These ordinary men and women have done so much to protect others.

Then there is the outpouring of empathy and compassion wanting to help others and animals to recover.

It is the worst of times and yet it is shot through with the light of human kindness and compassion and the invitation to perhaps reset how we see ourselves and what is important.

In response to difficulty Jesus does not withdraw to do nothing but to point a new way forward, a change that brings light and life. He does not shy away from the difficulties of his time but points a new way forwards. The promise is real.

Each of us are called to the continuing journey of changing our hearts and minds in ways that live out what it means to be people of the light, people who offer a different way.

It is to follow in the steps of Jesus to be living signs of hope and compassion to proclaim good news and heal and teach, to care for the last and the least.

For our country it is to continue to realise that we are connected to each other and our land and to be open to hear our indigenous people and to care for our fragile and unique flora and fauna.

One thing we can always do is to pray: each of you have a card in the shape of a eucalyptus leaf.

I'd invite you to hold it and write a prayer for our country, for its people and its animals and plants and for one thing you would like to do differently.

*Lections:  
Isaiah 9.1-4  
Psalm 27.1-10  
1 Corinthians 1.10-18  
Matthew 4.12-25*