

Sunday 7th January, 2007

**The Baptism of our Lord
First Sunday after the Epiphany**

Sentence

The Holy Spirit descended on Jesus in bodily form like a dove, and a voice came from heaven ‘You are My Son; with You I am well pleased.’

Luke 3:22

Collect

Spirit of energy and change, in Whose power Jesus was anointed to be the hope of the nations, be poured out also upon us, without reserve or distinction, that we may have confidence and strength to implant Your justice upon earth, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Amen

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

Isaiah 43: 1 – 7

PSALM

29

FOR THE EPISTLE

Acts 8:14 – 17

GOSPEL

Luke 3: 15 – 22

NOTES ON THE READINGS

Unless and until people get past the perception that Christianity is all about feel good stuff and a God Who will look after you, nothing of the above will ever make the slightest sense. In fact nothing in this file will make sense! Two things stand out in this series of readings: the first is God and His community in the real world seeking to be agents of change, and the second is that all this will be one hell of an uphill battle. Now lets get on with it:

Old Testament Lesson

Israel was in captivity in Babylon, devastated, defeated, demeaned and without hope. All the world was against them and they were nothing more than pawns in their enemies’ hands. Or that’s as they thought.

It was the great contribution of the major prophets to bring Israel to see that, while they had certainly stuffed up, God had not finished with them, and certainly, God was not somehow dead Himself. Here is profession of love from God, promise of a future (however different to what had preceded it), and that there was still a huge task to be carried out. In terms of modern day dilemmas, Israel had had its hope restored. And that is a huge first step.

Psalm

When someone is going through the ‘valley of the shadow’ it is always helpful to get a clearer picture of God to restore hope. This is what the psalmist is attempting, and while it may not recharge *your* batteries, it will certainly help some. All that talk of power and wind and stuff may be translated, as often I do, into reminders of the eternal value of love, justice, compassion and integrity. God is guarantor of those things.

Epistle

Do not lose sight of the fact that, as far as most Jews were concerned, Samaritans were further behind the eight-ball than Gentiles. (Samaritans should have known better, but didn’t.) However, some of those outsiders had become aware of the value of Jesus, and had chosen to be followers. And – you can almost imagine it, can’t you? – that needed checking out at the highest level. Can’t have any interlopers on board now can we!

GOSPEL

In a way, there is too much in this passage to relate to. A bit too much to chew off. But let’s try.

People were looking for all their answers from John, and he must have been tempted to set himself up as the fount of all knowledge. It is a measure of John’s greatness that he did nothing of the sort. But this business of being baptized, at that stage, reflected the wider Jewish practice of the time using baptism as a rite of initiation for non-Jews looking at the Hebrew faith. So it was a sign of commitment and initiation into a community. Read that again please.

So when Jesus was baptized, it was His sign of commitment to the community and to the task of being this community’s leader and guide. Jesus. Baptism, for us, is a statement that He Who has begun His task will complete it regardless of the cost to Himself.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

At this particular point in time (Sept 06) there is a series of adverts on TV for Austar. You may well have seen them: a man and a woman being offered conditional marriage in a spoof for a no-contract offer from the satellite TV source. Sure it is in fun, but it has to be said that, in today's day and age, no lock in contract tends to be the rule for *anything*. Nothing permanent, just for as long as it lasts. And cities and towns are smothered in the by-products of such short-term liaisons.

It must have been years ago that I was asked to marry a couple – both mentally disabled – and my heart yearned for the pair of them, so ill-equipped for life. I asked the man why he looked for marriage and he professed his love. 'What do you mean 'I love her?'' I asked. He looked at me quite scathingly, and replied, 'She turns me on!' 'And what happens when she does not?' I asked, and he was silent for a moment. 'I guess that is the end of that, then,' he responded, and was somewhat put out when I suggested that they might think and talk rather more about each other, and come back later. They didn't – and were married by a remarkably naïve Salvo bloke, even though they had their reception in our Church Hall. Nothing wrong with that at all, except that three months later, the Downs Syndrome lady was discarded like a rag doll. And that **was** problem.

Baptism. A commitment to a life-style, a cause, a faith. A community, the Church. A commitment to serve and belong and be part of the movement and work. This is what Jesus was saying in His baptism, even though it killed Him. And thank God for such total commitment.

One couple that I married years ago, returned a couple of years later asking for the baptism of their child. A feisty miss was she, daughter and grand-daughter of members of the congregation. 'And I don't want any of that \$%^&* about having to go to Church to be a Christian.' I posed a question to the lass. 'How long is it since you have been to Church?' I asked. She wanted to know if I meant baptisms and weddings and suchlike. 'No,' I replied, 'I mean Church Church.' She thought again a while. 'About nine years,' she answered. 'OK,' said I quietly, 'If your husband makes love to you once in nine years, are you married really?' Steam came out of her ears very swiftly indeed, as did her answer, loud and clear. '{Expletive deleted} If he goes any longer than nine *days*', she yelled at me, 'he is **dead**.' 'I rest my case!' was my last word on the subject, and she called me for everything.

But that is the point. I cannot be human without you; I cannot be Christian without the community. I cannot be a person of faith in some sort of individual envelope. And if I think otherwise, then I am fooling only myself.

That means I am confronted, from time to time, with people very difficult to relate to, and they may well say the same about me. But that is the situation where we need to grow, to operate and to express our sense of belonging. In that sort of position it is not all that easy for me to be static, inert, unmoving.

Sentence

Jesus revealed His glory, and His disciples believed in Him. *John 2:11*

Collect

Bountiful God, Whose Son revealed His glory at Cana in Galilee, help us to believe and obey, so that, as our Saviour promised, we may be filled with the wine of new life, and show forth His joy and love, Who lives and reigns with You in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever **Amen**

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

Isaiah 62: 1 – 5

PSALM¹

36: 1 – 10

EPISTLE

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

GOSPEL

John 2: 1 – 11

NOTES ON THE READINGS

OT LESSON

What a pity that so few of us can read Hebrew! If we were able, there would be so much more visible to us in such readings as this. *Hepzibah = my delight is in her, and beulah = married. Strong contrast to ‘forsaken’ and ‘desolate.’*

Israel, still in captivity, has that sense of being deserted, unloved, and going nowhere. It is usually a self-centred concern. And self-destructive. But Isaiah is aware of far more stuff going on, seeing the enormous potential in the faith in JHWH, and what could and should be the goal and activity of Israel. Why, ponders Isaiah, can Israel not see the enormous and life-giving qualities that Judaism was designed to provide, not only for Israel, but also for the whole world?

PSALM

I have provided a footnote to explain that I have begun this Psalm at verse 1, for the strong reason that it offers us the clear contrast between what God has to offer, and what the alternative has. In the imagery of the Gospel, it is water as opposed to the best wine. (If you are teetotal, you will miss the point, and probably much of the piquancy.)

In this day and age of rejection of Gospel, Church and faith, it helps for people of faith to stop and realize that this rejection – in the final analysis – makes not the slightest sense. If people want crap they are free to choose it, but that is what they will have, and no more. You, dear reader, have something far more valuable, relevant and worthwhile – so hang in there until others ask you what it is that you have.

EPISTLE

Goodness, has this section of Paul’s epistle caused some confusion for people over the (recent) years! Most of this confusion has come (a) because of quite a lot of populist attention to the gifts of the Spirit, and (b) people’s refusal to do more that take out a verse at a time. If you want to get the clear picture, then you need to read from Chapter 12 to the end of Chapter 14 taking notice of all that Paul wrote.

The reality Paul writes about is very much lower key than many allow. He is basically expressing the conviction that each congregation has gifts enough, between the group, for its own survival to enable it to thrive. And he is careful to show that they are *gifts* so that no one is able to go all thingy about having something that others do not. Gifts are designed be cement to unite, not structures to divide.

May I reiterate: gifts are *gifts from God for the benefit of all, full stop, Amen,*

GOSPEL

What a stunning incident, with all sorts of side effects so to speak. And – please and pretty please – note once again John’s use of the word **sign**, and I dare to request that you delete ‘miraculous’ from the NIV (or any other) translation because ‘miraculous’ **is not there at all.**

Jesus’ use of miracles was not to convince people but to get them thinking. As one wise commentator put it, He used them as teaching aids and nothing more. The real question has to do with ‘what is He saying?’ And the

¹ I have taken the liberty of starting the Psalm at verse 1, in order to heighten the contrast between the fresh and living water that God supplies and the dirty water that stems from evil. Omit the first four verses if you think me silly.

answer to that was quite clear to those present and should be to us. His contrast between water and wine was the illustration, *par excellence*, of the difference between the Judaism of His day and the far more sparkling worship of God and response to each other that He epitomised. And lived. (Mind you, anyone these days who has never tasted wine will not be aware in the slightest of what that contrast is expressing.)

What led the disciples to 'believe in Him' was that they began (and only *began*) to catch sight of what He was pointing them to and offering them.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

Back in the days when I was a pup, rather too much of Biblical analogy tended to fall on deaf, and very conservative ears. Very few Christians in the '40s and '50s, (to my knowledge then at least) even began to believe that when this story talked about wine, that it talked about fermented stuff. 'Jesus would never have drunk wine,' most declared, 'it would have had to have been just grape juice.' I kid you not! Even with my own parents, nothing fermented ever passed their lips, except at Communion.

Given that rather large and interesting blocking out, (and the fact that miracles were all the rage,) almost nothing of the impact of this Gospel passage reached the audience for which it was designed. Wacko, Jesus could turn water into wine. And that gets one quite nowhere really. Maybe He sped up the process a little, but what does that say to anyone? All of this is the sort of stuff which has tended to lead far too many people to turn their backs on what looked like a naïve and pointless expression of what passed for 'faith.' For 'faith' is not a matter of believing the incredible; it is far more a matter of seeing what is important, and often quite tangible. And heading where that leads. As I often say, 'faith is a matter of discovering the facts and realities, and becomes a choice one makes on the basis of that evidence.' In other words, please see that the effect on the disciples was a matter of them having to take off their blinkers somewhat, to see that Jesus was on more than just being religious or goody-goodies.

In Hebrew perception and expression, the nation and faith was often epitomised by reference to the grapevine, - or its products, - fig trees and their products, and other such images. It was so common as to be almost endemic. The point of mentioning this is simply to underline that anyone present at that wedding feast would have been very much aware of what was being said by Jesus. So right at the outset of His ministry was this challenge laid down to the very faith to which He also belonged.

In our own day and age, it seems to me that the same sort of message and challenge needs strong repetition. We humans have always had that strange propensity to alter, minimise and realign the Faith to which we belong, usually to render it more acceptable to ourselves, or sometimes to others. Like the Jews of old, we manage to turn a life-giving Way of Life into a dead or morbid religion, removing most of the taste, tang and piquancy of its purpose and point. More often, we turn the Faith once delivered into some sort of competition where we reckon we have what others do not. Even the Eucharist has, over centuries, been turned from a sacrament of unity into a show of division.

So if there is something to concentrate on, that emerge from these readings, it is to come back to the realities of the Faith, the simplicities and points and purpose, so that the tang of new wine is visible and tastable – not only for ourselves, but for the world around us.

Sentence

Jesus read from the Scriptures, “The Spirit of the Lord has anointed me to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the captives.”

Luke 4:18

Collect

Living God, Who sent Your Son Jesus to proclaim Your Kingdom and to teach with authority; anoint us with Your Spirit that we, too, may bring good news to the poor, bind up the broken-hearted and proclaim liberty to the captives; through Jesus Christ our Lord, Who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever.

Amen

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

Nehemiah 8: 1 – 10 (part)

PSALM

19

EPISTLE

1 Corinthians 12: 12 – 31

GOSPEL

Luke 4: 14 – 21

NOTES ON THE READINGS

There is a previous Archbishop of Sydney who is reputed to have said, in response to the broad field of comment from someone or other, that he had ‘dribbled a bibful.’ In other words, a hell of a lot had been said by that person. Those words came to mind as I brought in the readings for today, each of them. There is so much to look at, ponder and enjoy that it is not really possible to cover all bases. I hope you see things the same way.

Old Testament Lesson

Just a couple of things to focus upon here. Can you imagine being required to stand (or even sit) from early morning till midday or later, listening to the Torah being read and then explained? What a hell of a requirement! However, the point of the tale is to underline the fact that those leading the people then made sure that the exercise was one of delight and celebration! It should well have been so, but one does not often connect some ‘religious’ exercise with celebration. However, surely that is the way it should be.

Psalm

I am surprised at the number of times this Psalm is set down for reading. This must be the fourth or fifth time in less than a year. Mind you it is a fascinating psalm, delighting in creation and Torah, valuing them and the Creator above all else. *And why not, one may well ask!*

Epistle

Here is such a ‘bibful’ that I hardly know where to start. Following on from last week’s passage, it contains both the core of Paul’s ‘body theology of the Church’ and a rather fascinating expose of it. If there is one particular aspect of the gifts of the Spirit it is that, like the Eucharist, a means of unity and community of all sorts of disparate people. In fact the whole point and purpose of the Gospel is the reconciliation of people to God and people to each other. Tragically, so very few people or preachers ever seem to see or emphasise that.

We need each other, and we are all equipped differently to be of use to each other. And instead of deploring our differences, we really ought to be finding ways of enjoying each other and learning from each other.

GOSPEL

That story of Jesus preaching in His home town is a really passionate one.

It was perfectly normal in the synagogue situation for a known adult to be asked to do the readings for that day and then to go on to preach. That part was quite normal, even predictable. What follows was not.

The passage from Isaiah 62 is stunning stuff. Isaiah, who seems to have spent a lot of his time pondering what God was doing with Israel, came up with his fascinating collection of what many call the Servant Songs. This is one of the last of them. Reiterating the reference to reconciliation just above, Isaiah saw the need for just that, and described as part of the role of the **Servant of the Lord**.

If you take time to refer back to the prophet, you will see that Jesus left something out of Isaiah's expectation – *the day of vengeance of our God*. In the light of the Gospel it is not an unexpected omission, but apart from anything else, it does underline the fact that even prophets were capable of error. Isaiah expected something like punishment for the evildoer, and Jesus did not.

But do note the aspects restated by our Lord: and see that we are not all that crash-hot at expressing them these days or even pushing for them to occur. It is not a matter of releasing all the people in prison, but it is a matter of pointing to and offering real hope and future to everyone who longs for such release. And there are lots of them.

Back to Nazareth: although it does not show up here, there was a savage reaction from the locals, who could not begin to imagine that someone they knew so well, and had grown up with could possibly be the Provider of Answers so deep and so general. Like Aussies after them, people of Nazareth could not cope with tall poppies, but would cut them off at the knees. Why ever are humans so bloody-minded?

NOTES FOR A SERMON

You may well consider me as something of a person from a distant past, but I report having great difficulty with people more modern who seem somehow to respond to life and other people only on the basis of their feelings. While it may be said that intuition is something we need to be rather more aware of, and first reactions may well prove correct, there appears to be far less realism or responsibility in today's world of reactions.

What brought this on, you may well ask? And the answer tends to be along the lines of where today's Readings started me thinking. How do we know, or at least get some clear idea of which way is true; how do we manage to hear God speak to us, and where do we look in the first place? Seems to me that we have several answers from these readings.

The story of Nehemiah offers one direction. Israel was back from the horror of the Exile experience, and facing the enormous and difficult task of rebuilding the devastated country. It must have been a huge struggle, with little overt evidence that God was there with them. Nehemiah's response to that situation was to go back to what may be called a Square One, and read through the Torah to the people. While that may sound like an exercise in boredom, it was in reality a recall to their roots. *If you want to know where to head, look back to where you have come from*. Certainly, it was a matter of 'hearing the Word of the Lord.' I would ask you to see, also, that it was a matter of recalling the long history and experience of generations of people in their awareness and openness to God. The mere fact that the ancient writings had been retained and re-read and re-used was an indication, surely, that the people saw their value and importance. This is far more valid than some sort of mechanistic view of Scripture. It was a matter of realizing afresh that the experience of Israel, for many generations, was embedded in those writings. They had passed the test of time, apart from anything else.

And it was not only in life, history and experience, that God managed to make Himself known. This remarkable Psalm, repeated often in our Three Year Lectionary, underlines another source of awareness of God that was of help to Israel. Nature itself spoke to them, not only of the existence of God, but also of quite something of His nature. It is a recognition, is it not, that both nature and spirit offer a remarkably connected message. There is connectedness, there is balance, and even the Torah fits together and adds to it all.

In the Epistle, St. Paul goes on to add to the connection, using both life and physiology as examples and pointers. It may well be a long way around in expressing it, but it all boils down to the same sort of message. You do not have to look to the heavens for answers, you do not need to go off with the fairies. You need only look at what is near and everyday. We all need each other, just as we all need our different organs and attributes. And that is something this entire world needs to grasp and act on, right at this very moment.

And then there is the Gospel, this formative and most expressive passage which both looks back to Isaiah (nearly 600 years previous) and looks forward, not only in terms of Jesus' own ministry but also of ours. There was nothing all that unusual about Jesus being asked to do the reading that Sabbath, nor even to be the preacher. It was normal process, but it would scare the living daylights out of many in today's congregations. Do a check back for yourself, and see where Jesus' text came from, and notice that He omitted a phrase that few would have dared then. No room in Jesus' teaching for retribution and punishment.

So what is He really doing? Running that record of Israel's experience of God through His own mind and person, taking hold of what was important and leaving out that which was not so valuable. And, as mentioned above, He offered people of His own day and ours a way forward in the experience of God and of life. In almost complete contradistinction to today's attitudes, He saw, expressed in words and in His life and actions, the concern for other than Himself, for the downtrodden, for the unfortunate. There was no yelling and shouting, there was

simply the bouncing off Isaiah's vision, and making it relevant to His own day and age. Because this passage tends to be so familiar to us, we miss the point entirely that it was utterly and radically different to what people then expected of 'religion.'

The vast pity is that for some obscure reason, people of whatever age manage to turn a living faith into a dead religion. Perhaps it is a ploy to excuse our capacity to miss the point of it all.

Sentence

Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know only in part: then I will know fully, even as I have been fully known.
1 Cor. 13:14

Collect

Righteous God, You confound human wisdom by giving Your blessing to the lowly and pure in heart; give us such a hunger and thirst for justice, and perseverance in striving for peace, that in our words and deeds others may see the promised of Your Kingdom which has been revealed in Jesus Christ our Lord.

OLD TESTAMENT LESSON

Jeremiah 1: 4 – 10

PSALM

71: 1 – 6

EPISTLE

1 Corinthians 13: 1 – 13

GOSPEL

Luke 4: 21 – 30

Notes on the Readings

It is an interesting spread of readings for today: remember that ‘epiphany’ has to do with something being opened up and made clear. Sometimes that is an encouraging and helpful exercise; sometimes it comes as a challenge (yet may well end up being encouraging. Jeremiah’s call, Paul panegyric on love (agape) and that shattering business of Jesus preaching in Nazareth Let’s try and put it all together.

Old Testament Lesson

When young and naïve, I tended to see all the Biblical worthies as high and mighty, powerful and wise people. I mean Jesus would not have chosen some dumb-dumb to be an apostle surely. But then one’s Biblical understanding and even one’s own life experience takes off some rather silly blinkers. It was a highly onerous and difficult task to be prophet, and one is left wondering how many times those people back then questioned the validity of their roles and choices.

Two things stand out like organ stops in today’s reading: (1) although Jeremiah was aware of the fact that others may not consider him a prophet, he himself could recall that sense of destiny from childhood. It is true that very often, the called one is not all that certain until the passage of time makes it clear that the choice was valid and God-given.

The second thing is entangled in the first: one might be foolish enough to assume that if one is called to be prophet (or priest or to any other office) then the world at large will listen. Not Pygmalion likely!!!! Although no prophet, this priest can aver that even the most committed Christian may back-peddle when faced with some issues. Poor old Jeremiah was to find out, throughout his life, that there are always those who are ready willing and able to get rid of you, by fair means or foul. *But that does not necessarily deny the truth for which Jeremiah stood. Truth may well take some time to become obvious! Epiphany is not always oh! So very clear.*

Psalm

I wonder if you look at this psalm and picture someone, cowed and bent and with the proverbial tail between their legs, looking for parent God to sort things out? It really does look so very sad, on the surface, does it not.

However look again with a different slant. Here, it seems, it a person operating under difficulty against a community that has discarded the verities of life. He feels very much alone against ‘the strength.’ And that same man sees his God as the source of his strength and encouragement. An there lies the reality. With God on your side you make a majority of two, so to speak. In other words, the Psalmist was very aware of the fact that truth, justice and integrity will always outlive whoever posits their opposite.

Epistle

How does anyone fit comment on this passage into anything less than a book? ‘What the world needs now is love sweet love’ is how the Baccarach song has gone and the question is how does one define ‘love.’ You will know the three Greek words for love, and may even be aware of the fact that St. Paul brought an ancient (then) Greek word out of desuetude to give it new life. That Greek word is agape – ἀγάπη – to describe and define the

love God has for His world of people. Agape is sometimes expressed as ‘I love you in spite of who you are!’ whereas most human love is limited by whatever effect I want you to have on **me**.

Run all that past you as you read through that passage again, and then try to come to terms with the stunning statement that ‘love lies at the heart of the Creator’ – and it is only in that direction that life can begin to reach towards its potential. Human agape is far less than Divine, but then if you aim at nothing, you will hit it, won’t you!

One final word: when a brother of mine insisted that I strive to speak in tongues, many years ago, I replied by saying that when I have exhausted the gift of love, then I will worry about looking for others.

GOSPEL

It is always useful to read the fine print – and read it imaginatively. In Jewish culture, one could discard what someone was saying if you had no idea of antecedents. If you knew them and their family, then you needed to stop and listen. The congregation at that synagogue that day reversed that process. Point 1.

If there was an issue bound to raise blood pressure and angst amongst Jewish people it was to offer any encouragement to Samaritans and Gentiles. Point 2.

So you see that our Lord was brave enough – or silly enough? – to make it quite clear that the truth of God was available to people those Jews despised, and they may well find themselves sidelined by the very groups that they despised. Jesus raised the issues by pointing them to well-known incidents in Elijah and Elisha’s time. Now that would have been part of Hebrew history and folk-lore for over a thousand years. But Jesus managed to get under their skin with something they already knew but refused to acknowledge. In fairly usual human rage, the congregation decided to eliminate Jesus. (Notice how often those who are self-righteous over some issue will be the first to act right outside the very legality that they would require for themselves. The fact that Jesus walked through the crowd was the result, I would suspect, of Jesus staring them in the eye and daring them to do their worst. Few bullies can face either direct stare or the pointing to the truth.

NOTES FOR A SERMON

This may come out of left field a little for some, but as we have been thinking ‘epiphany’ for some weeks, this set of readings seems to speak to me about the different sorts of ways in which truth and reality can simply come to us. If our eyes are open and our systems alert to what we need (rather than want) then all sorts of epiphanies can happen.

It is all a bit like ‘inspiration’ in a way. How often do painters and writers and artists report that everything (or a lot of it) simply came to them. We Christians would describe it as a gift of the Spirit. They may well not, but the experience is certainly similar if not the same. However, it needs to be said about such artists that they are open and looking and listening; closed minds are of no use, it would seem to me, in the fields they cover. If you are game, then you can see the clear parallels once again.

Would you come on a walk with me this morning, taking these readings apart, and seeing the epiphanies of the people concerned there, **or their refusal and failure to see what was right in front of their eyes.**

Dear old Jeremiah. Actually young Jeremiah here. How did he have that call to be prophet? I suspect that the answer was (dare I put it this way?) not because God wanted just **him**, but that God wanted him because he was an open and alert and questioning sort of person. (*I am convinced that the reason Abraham was the father of all was not because he was Abraham but because he was a searcher, not satisfied with pat and facile answers. I am certain that this is why God said to Himself, ‘You will do me for a steady!’*)

Now no one with any sense chooses to be a prophet. No one with any sense chooses to be a priest. (In fact the one or two I have met over the years became something of disaster areas both to themselves as well as to those to whom they tried to minister. Square pegs in round holes is not God’s idea of a joke. However once you are fingered, you need to grow, not so much in theological knowledge as in that same openness and awareness that set you up for the task in the first place. I would simply point to the rest of Jeremiah’s life and ministry to establish the point I am making.

And that anonymous psalmist. As noted above, there was a bloke with a life crisis – he felt all sorts of pressure to join the mob and have done with all that is good and true and just. And as he pondered the options and alternatives, it became clear to him that – after all was said and done – there was but one valid and true way to go, and he headed there. Epiphany. Does that ring a bell?

Now to that stunning epistle. 1 Corinthians 13. Well known even to people outside the Church and valued by them even if they tend to see its impossibility for we humans. In this world in which we live, there are all too many prepared to give lip service to this passage, but go on to do a complete and try and find solutions militarily or violently. One needs to stop and consider longer term outcomes, if one wants lasting solutions. Mind you, one does not change this sort of direction without a lot of thought and a lot more conviction. This is 'stick your neck out' stuff. Another epiphany, would you not say?

The Gospel comes with the biggest whack of all from where I sit. Australians are noted for their capacity to cut people off at the knees, to pull down tall poppies, and to refuse to listen to real and common sense. Jesus had the same trouble with people and especially with those who knew Him (or said they did.) The Great Australian public, like – obviously – the Great Jewish public then – are often not a pretty sight, for both parties in this set up seem determined to look after Number One, first middle and last. When I was young, few people became violent like that synagogue population that day, but that is changing too is it not, and one is likely to be clobbered or worse for looking sideways at someone else. Or having a sharp knife embedded between one's ribs.

This then surely is the epitome of the **refusal of any epiphany** – and the outcome of that is tragic and very destructive. It is the refusal to stop and think and listen. It is the stuff of so many violent crimes of the present day. And I confess to being quite angry when someone is let off on the basis of no knowing they were doing wrong. That is one of the biggest furrphies of all, and the ramifications of that perception is going to echo through communities for yonks or until someone realizes the extent of its falsehood. I am human; I am responsible. Full stop. Amen.

Epiphanies, then. And the refusal of epiphanies. Nothing of what has rated mentions above is the preserve of religious people. None of it is at all extraordinary to normal human life for believers or others. It covers the gamut of human life and thought and crosses right over our often artificial boundaries of religions, philosophies and isms. And we all know that, don't we!