

O come, o come, Emmanuel

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 24 December, 2019

A Contemporary Reflection by Warren Talbot

Christmas Eve A

Isaiah: 52:7-10; John 1:1-14; Contemporary Reading
'How the Light Comes' by Jan Richardson

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RhL_oI9KLAw

Writing from the Manus Island prison, in which he was incarcerated by the Australian Government for six years, the Iranian Kurdish refugee, Behrouz Boochani looks to the mountains.

Using hundreds of text messages, Boochani wrote a book which is called "*No friend but the mountain*". It is a remarkable text that combines graphic refugee narrative, poetry, Kurdish literature, philosophy and even a bit of theology.

The mountains referred to include the mountains of waves which nearly killed Behrouz Boochani and dozens of other refugees in the waters between Indonesia and Australia. There is a deep sense of longing for freedom, which Behrouz has now achieved, at least partially, in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Writing from captivity in Babylon nearly two and a half thousand years before Behrouz Boochani, the Judean prisoners also looked to the mountains – the mountain of Jerusalem. Zion. Like Boochani they longed for freedom and for justice and their priestly editors produced the remarkable text we have in our Scriptures as Isaiah chapters 40-55, known as deutero or second Isaiah.

We heard that deep sense of longing in Handel's superb musical setting of Isaiah 52, sung by Lynne Murray a few minutes ago. "*How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces salvation.*"

Second Isaiah also give us the image of Yahweh's Servant who will "*not grow faint or be crushed until justice is established on earth.*"

Christians have long identified that image, of God's servant, with none other than the Christ Child. That the Christ Child, the hope of world, has come, was and remains an audacious claim.

It was an audacious claim in the context of the Roman occupation of Palestine.

It is an audacious claim today where refugees continue to suffer imprisonment and cruelty, in this case, inflicted by the Australian Government.

Our Government!

This is a dilemma we all face, in one way or another. We long for the coming of the Christ Child. We long for the coming of God's community of justice and peace, and we celebrate that community tonight - in the figure of the baby Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

This tension is actually seen in our liturgy tonight where, with our opening hymn, we are longing for Emmanuel to come; and the carols we will be singing in a few minutes time, celebrate the coming of the Christ Child with joy.

The French philosopher Paul Ricoeur spoke about faith as "*the joy of Yes, in the sadness of no*". *The joy of Yes, in the sadness of no*.

We can sing "*Joy to the world, the Christ has come*". That is, after all, the central claim of Christianity - that the Christ has come!

But we also remain aware, in our personal lives and relationships, in society, and in our exploitation of Mother Earth, that justice has not yet come. Where is! Where, exactly is Isaiah's messenger of peace, bringing justice to the earth?

Christmas involves the joy of Yes, and the sadness of No.

Joy to the world!

O come, O come, Emmanuel....

Amen.

References:

- Behrouz Boochani, *No Friend but the Mountains: Writing from Manus Prison*. Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2018.
Walter Brueggemann, *The Prophetic Imagination*. Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978.
Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus: Uncovering the Life, Teachings, and Relevance of a Religious Revolutionary*. New York: Harper One, 2006.
Paul Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.