

Along the track

Read it to us Again

At a recent Mass for the children, the Parish Priest had this to say: "Luke wrote this Gospel about sixty five years after Jesus died. He wrote it because he wanted you to hear it, he wanted you to hear what Jesus had to say, what Jesus did."

While Luke and the other Gospel writers probably had no idea that this school would ever exist, there is an element of truth in what the PP said. I couldn't get it out of my mind for a few days, hence this edition! Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote the Gospels so that all these years later we might come to know Jesus through his words and his action, in the way he interacted with people and ultimately in his death and resurrection. They took time to choose what they would include and why. The Gospels were written for different communities, different audiences and that includes us all these years later. I found that thought a bit humbling.

I worked in a very remote area in Papua in the late 1960s and early 1970s. These people were hearing about Jesus for the first time and they were, in the main, fascinated by what they heard. Every week the village catechist took a section of the Gospel and read it to those who gathered each evening. He read stories and parables that you and I are probably familiar with, but they had never heard them, and they were full of questions. The request, 'read it to us again' was very common.

We can become too familiar with the Gospels. We have heard it all before, read it all before. But our life changes, our circumstances change. In St Paul's words: When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became an adult, I set aside childish ways. 1 Cor 13 11

The authors of the Gospels wrote them to be 'good news,' to make a difference to the lives of those who heard them, to those who read them. At every stage of life, we bring something new to our reading of the gospels, some new way of hearing and understanding. We bring our lives, what is happening, how we are feeling, our stage of faith, what may be challenging us. So what was Jesus saying to these people at this time, what was his essential message? How does that relate to me today? If we are open it, the Gospels can still have a message for us today in this time and place. Some years ago I was at a seminar, and the lecturer asked us to read a very familiar passage from scripture, the story of the good shepherd. Someone read it aloud,

then we were asked to read it and reflect on it. There were insights in there I had never seen.

The Gospels are good news for today. Just about every word of them have been examined from top to bottom and scholars have written theological tomes on every aspect of these documents, all of which have added depth and scholarship and understanding. But essentially they were written to be good news that could make a difference to people's lives, to speak to them in all sorts of circumstances, in the good times and the bad, in the times of joy and the times of anguish and doubt, to speak to those who have decided that religion is no longer part of their lives. As Paul said, when I became an adult I put aside childish ways. We have to approach the Gospels in whatever stage of life we find ourselves and be open to reading them in that way. Just think for a moment of those Jesus met along the way, the enthusiastic, the doubters, the angry, the hostile, the curious, those prepared to make a commitment and those who decided that such a decision was not for them at this time. The Gospel helps us to meet Jesus as a teacher, healer, and counsellor and one who understands where we are and what we are thinking. The Gospels are full of encounters that help us understand that.

I was lucky enough twenty or so years ago to study in Jerusalem. The lecturer we had on the Gospel of Mark still stands out as the best I have ever had (and there have been many). He was erudite, full of knowledge and understanding, with an ability to convey that with extraordinary clarity. But that wasn't the only reason I would mark him out as the best. It was his love of the Gospel and its power to transform lives that made him such a powerful influence. Why not read a passage today?

Regards
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