

Reflection about Joel's prophecy & pictures & story about the patience, courage and determination of the people of Mapoon, northern Queensland, who waited on God for deliverance.

Those of you who subscribe to With Love for the World will have had the benefit of hearing from the Uniting Earth Team commentary this week; where we are urged to listen to, and think hard about the prophecies our young people are offering. I certainly attended the first Strike for climate of School children along with Catherine & baby Miro.

We do not know how much time we have to listen to the prophets.

The people of Mapoon called and called upon God and authorities; help came – even though about 50-60 years later

- **Map of tip of north Queensland**

Jenny: Mapoon Church re-built:

- Brothers Herbert & Frank

Brothers Herbert and Frank Asai were just children when they were forced from their homeland and still remember the traumatic event. 'They came in the night like a croc and burnt everyone's home.' The reason for the mission's closure are still contested to this day. That was in 1963.

"They said it was water pollution, that the water was awful and the place wasn't suitable for us, so we got removed out," Frank said. "It was all lies.....they said there was hookworm, that was a lie." "We lived off spring water wells....we'd go hunting, we lived off the land.....we were in happy in them."

Ricky Guivarra remembers the stories his great aunt told about the forced removal. "It was a horror for those remaining, to be tipped out of their houses and their homes set alight". "They weren't mission homes, and they weren't government homes, they were private houses that belonged to the people."

As Mapoon's resident historian, Mr Guivarra has collected correspondence from the time and is adamant the mission's closure had little to do with the peoples' welfare. He believes it was about access to the area's rich bauxite reserves. "We copied various documents which denote infrastructure coming out from Mapoon, out from Cullen Point, wharves and the like." There was a real intent at the time of building a port here for the export of bauxite but it never happened; they chose Weipa over Mapoon in the end.

Many of the people were sent north and settled in New Mapoon, but others were dispersed across northern Queensland to towns including Normanton, Mareeba and Cairns. Some began returning to the area in the mid-1970's to rebuild the community, which now has a population of about 300 residents. But many felt there was something missing. Both were baptised in the old church and have longed to see a new one built in its place.

Edna Mark was removed from her family in Mapoon as a four year old and sent to Stanthorpe in the state's south. Edna moved back to Mapoon in 2004. She had the honour of opening the new church which will see an end to religious services being held in makeshift venues such as the sport and recreation hall. "When we have funerals it's just done in a hall and to me that just disrespectful."

Edna is part of the Western Capes Community Coexistence Agreement (WCCCA) a group representing traditional owners to distribute mining royalties, she has lobbied for a church for 20 years. "A church is just a building, but you need to have a special place where people can congregate and share their feelings, know there's a spiritual presence there that can help our people." There will be regular church services at Mapoon.

The WCCCA funded the entire \$1.6 million build after the Queensland government rejected an invitation to contribute. The state has contributed to housing and infrastructure. In 2016 our 14th.

Assembly committed to assisting the community with the building of a new church. Finally opened in December 2021!!

I mentioned the Earth Team – young prophets calling to us, members of the Uniting Church, to take the chance now to listen to the voices about Climate Change:

Hear again those last words from Joel:

“I will pour out my Spirit
on every kind of people:
Your sons will prophesy,
also your daughters.
Your old men will dream,
your young men will see visions.

On Friday afternoon, 15 of us gathered at Cameron Close and heard the dreams and cries of Margaret & Peter: - so similar, matching the interpretation of the prophecies of Joel seen by the young Uniting Earth Team in NSW - sometimes we think it is all too hard – however the people of Joel’s time, and the people who returned to Mapoon made positive changes when they worked together as community supporting, encouraging and inspiring each other. Margaret urged us to listen to the writings of Claire O’Rourke, whose book Together we can, helps us see what realisable steps we can take to improve our climate: if you watch Landline after church you’ll have seen the amazing new projects in two areas of our coastal seas where restoration of important weeds is being achieved; we were disturbed too, that some plants in our gardens, are actually invasive species, which we can eradicate. I know two of them are in the blocks from here in the church down to Canterbury Road – growing over other plants.

Let’s keep Joel’s prophecy in our hearts, and experience God as a gardener, intimately and actively involved in creation and asking for our help in stewarding the on-going creation we depend upon. Amen. 880

Reflection 2: Lutheran Irony

Ian did well, conveying Eugene Petersen’s interpretation of the Gospel to us; it is a favourite of our young UCA theologians - Kylie Crabbe – particularly likes the voice of the Pharisee: ‘I’m so glad that I’m not like the others’. Her partner on BY the Well, Fran Barbe, hopes we don’t think it’s about humility – it’s a very stark text!

In fact, our retired Professor Bill Loader reminds us to substitute for the word Pharisee, ‘a good Christian who stands complacently pleased with himself, and trusted in his own righteousness...’ – Luke was not saying all Pharisees are complacently pleased with themselves, Luke was trying to show us two figures well known to the hearers of Luke’s gospel.

It’s a parable about who is in and who is out - the double tithing emphasises the irony;

This particular figure head really had no need of God. He knew he was a very learned man and doubled his tithes, and even fasted more than was required! Where tax collectors were and are always unpopular. This is a cautionary story to those who are thankful, preening, peeking sideways at others, comparing themselves to others

Whereas the tax collector understands he had need for grace. He could well have been a scoundrel, over charging – like some people have been doing in Oz this past week! Tax collectors were maligned instruments of the oppressor Rome, taking bribes as well as due taxes, and many reasons why Luke’s hearers wouldn’t like the Tax collector figure. Our tax collector, who possibly represents Zacchaeus from next week’s gospel, feels too ashamed to come close to the Lord.

However, it’s not his confession that brings about a moment of grace. Not at all, in every moment God’s grace and unconditional generosity puts words of mercy. We are the Pharisee – sometimes consciously and sometimes subconsciously, justifying ourself to prove ‘at least we’re not like that’.

In next week's story of Zacchaeus, we will find, we, too, are Zacchaeus putting himself down, as we often malign ourselves, with a negative view of ourselves. Our texts stand up to interpretation by 21st. century human beings very well.

The Pharisee shows contempt for the other – that is one of his sins, however he also sees himself above reproof – the combination of which is toxic to authentic spirituality.

And it is part of today's public debate – how we dehumanise the other.

A progressive theologian I enjoy, John Petty, puts it like this: our situation is always hopeless, the twist is that even when we are at our best, such as the pharisee, we're actually worse off than we were before we shaped up and preened ourselves; when we're under the illusion that we're 'special' and 'better'.

This feeling has a technical name: it is known as Lutheran irony!! It means that even when we think we're close to God, especially then, our self-righteousness in thinking so means we are actually farther from God than we were to begin with. I do like that term "Lutheran irony" - reminding us of the Pharisee's self-delusion.

God is the master of impossible situations – even more fortunately, in terms of his love and mercy, God doesn't care a whit about the pharisee's spiritual 'accomplishments' or whether the tax collector has one blond on his arm or three.

The pharisee went before God dressed in his spiritual finery

The tax collector naked and bare.

That's why the story scares us

The key to the parable is that we are all forgiven sinners - yet we find it hard to accept that God accepts us all. Remember the words about Jesus in the Gospels: this man welcomes SINNERS – Jesus will shelter people rather than be the judge.

There is a challenge here for us, along with the incredible, stupendous GOOD NEWS which we don't wish to really understand. We don't really want to stand naked before others.

Yet at the same time, this is the very heart of the Good News.

We fall into the same trap as the pharisee: we think as we work out in the gym: I'm in pretty good shape, maybe that bloke hasn't'; or we might be thinking: I'm on good super, I wonder if they've even got an income; or at a party we might ask that stupid question: where do YOU live --

God sees all about us and knows all about us, every whiff of envy, every resentment, every act of self-deception – and throws it all out of the window. God is like the welcoming and waiting father in the prodigal son parable. It's our unadorned selves, ourselves who keep tripping into pharisee-hood, who need to come before God and experience his love without conditions or limits.

St Maximos the confessor of the 7th Century said: the person who has come to know the weakness of human nature has gained experience of divine power. Such a person never belittles anyone. He knows that God is like a good and loving physician who heals with individual treatment each of those who are trying to make progress.

Dorothy Day, exemplary Catholic worker for the poor in the America of early 20's through to the 70's who became interested in radical social causes, and eventually went on to found the Catholic Worker movement with Peter Maurin; they founded the Catholic worker newspaper, and established houses of hospitality for the poor and unemployed throughout USA and overseas: she said:

'Sometimes it is hard to see Christ in his poor, sometimes it is hard to see the Blessed Mother in women we come in contact with. But if we minister to each other, as we would want to serve the Holy Family, not judging the faults of others, but serving them with joy and respect, then that is the true way of seeing Christ in our neighbours. If he thought them worth dying for, who are we to judge. If you help people, you soon begin to love them just as gratitude makes you love people.'