

Seasons

Theme based reflections and outreach actions in ministry
The Word - Inform - Pray – Reach out - Celebrate



Celebration and Thanksgiving

On Celebration

Thoughts from Peter Heazlewood

The celebration... you cannot practice it or anything. It's a moment when the excitement of your goal makes you react to the moment.

Peter Bondra

What a great quote! Those of you who have followed the Seasons journey (now into its third year) will know of the regular inclusion of topical quotes. Sometimes very few words say a lot more than a whole lot of words.

This opening quote is not from a philosopher or world or religious leader. Peter Bondra was actually a member of the Slovakian National Ice-hockey team. I don't

know any more about him than that. I'm pretty sure though, he'd be surprised to know that I'm going to open our Season of Celebration and Thanksgiving with his words.

There are a couple of words in this quote that are key, those being 'moment', 'excitement', 'goal', 'react' and of course, 'celebration'. Being very 'active words' gives us a clue as to the nature of celebration. It is an *active* thing, often spontaneous and possibly always a reaction to something. And, it is a very important part of human nature – not always positive and not always loud and showy – but always notable.

This season – the season of Celebration and Thanksgiving commences during the period between Easter and Pentecost.

What better starting point could there be for us? For Christians, of all things, Easter is truly the most significant thing to celebrate. Christ risen! Celebrate! The pouring out of the Holy Spirit – Celebrate!

During the lead-in to Easter this year, I was reminded of a series of songs I wrote about ten years ago. There were four songs – each reflecting on an aspect of Easter.....Palm Sunday (and Jesus' arrival in Jerusalem), Maundy Thursday (and the Last Supper), Good Friday (and the crucifixion) and of course Easter Sunday and the discovery of the empty tomb.

For me, it was great to uncover these forgotten songs and for the first time, to have a chance to play them as part of our worship. Sometimes it's interesting going through old and forgotten songs and revisiting words that you wrote once and have since forgotten. Sometimes the words seem paltry, confused or just plain silly! Other times forgotten and discarded words hold unexpected wisdom and insight. In the Easter morning song 'Let this be the day', I knew of the narrative nature of the first three verses as they recount the story of the women visiting the empty tomb of Jesus and encounter Jesus risen. This is of course, cause for celebration and thanksgiving.

The fourth verse though, was one I had completely forgotten. It takes the whole resurrection thing to another place and expands its possibilities:

*Waiting by the way
I find myself decayed
I feel my heart, my hands, my head
Waiting to be raised
I'm waiting to be raised, waiting to be raised
I'm waiting to be raised, let this be the day!*

So, there is cause for celebration and resurrection even in the decay that we sometimes encounter in life. Through resurrection and celebration there's forward looking and hope here. Through the resurrection there is possibility. From death to

life. From lostness to salvation. From despair to hope. It's a fairly simple lyric – but with powerful possibilities. Resurrection becomes something *yes* that we celebrate *in and for* Christ, but this verse speaks of a sharing of resurrection in which we all can participate! The words speak not only of the *hope* of resurrection, but the *expectation* of resurrection for us. Celebrate!

So, do we take the time to stop, think and celebrate all of the gifts around us?

Possibly the answer is 'no'. I made the mistake the other day of tuning in to the commercial TV news. For a solid half-hour I was bombarded with misery, pain, heartache and tragedy. Why is it that media seem to fixate and trade on the negative? (the only news across the telecast with any sort of celebratory flavour was Hawthorn's stunning victory over Geelong in the season opener). Why, when there is so much that we have to celebrate and give thanks for? The danger is that we can become conditioned to think that the entire world is a place of heartache, evil and despair. We can be drawn in to a perception that there is little or nothing to celebrate.

Look around you. Look for the miracles and joys that abound. Don't become a slave of a society that celebrates and promotes negative. If you're looking for it, negative things can always be found. Instead, take time every day to recognise the gifts in life and celebrate them! Name them! It is important not to sugar coat life. Our Season of Celebration and Thanksgiving is not about pretending that life has no challenges. Nor is it about disregarding the challenges that we all have. That is reality. What this Season is about, is making and taking time in a world of challenge to recognise and give thanks for the gifts we have – the gifts within our families, those in our community and those in our world.....and believe it or not (and contrary to what we're told), there are plenty.

I have a friend who is going through a process whereby on each day across the course of a year she shares the things for which she celebrates and gives thanks for with her friends on Facebook. What a great idea! The process is referred to as 'Celebrate 365'. Through this process, she recognises the things in her life she counts as gifts (and there are many), names them and shares them. An excellent process that maybe during this season of celebration and thanksgiving you would consider doing in some form? When you meet as a group, why not actively take time to share the things you're thankful for – in your world, in the local community and across the globe? It certainly couldn't do any harm, and it becomes a reminder for us that we have much to celebrate.

During this Season of Celebration and Thanksgiving, we will (as part of worship) be spending time naming the things for which we give thanks. Be prepared! Recognise the many gifts we are given, the many things we need to give thanks for and the many things we can celebrate. Recognise them and be ready to name them.

Some quotations

Think of the magic of that foot, comparatively small, upon which your whole weight rests. It's a miracle, and the dance is a celebration of that miracle - Martha Graham

Singing is like a celebration of oxygen - Bjork

In the words of my 'lost' fourth verse, 'I feel my heart, my hands, my head waiting to be raised. I'm waiting to be raised, waiting to be raised, waiting to be raised, Let this be the day!

So.....be raised. Celebrate the gifts of family and community. Celebrate the gifts of nature, the gifts of new peace when it is born, hope when it comes and freedom when it is found. Celebrate the gifts of God. Be raised! Let this be the day – of re-birth, of celebration and of giving thanks!

The Word

A study by Gareth Darlow

Celebration!

The bible is full of times of celebration. The Israelites sing and dance in triumph after finally escaping the Pharaoh, David dances in the streets as the Ark is brought to Jerusalem, Jesus eats and eats and eats with all kinds of people (often raising the ire of those who believe that Godly people should be more refined in their choice of dining companion).

As people celebrate, they give thanks to God; for victory over their enemies, for refuge from torment, for the new life that results from healing or forgiveness. They sing, they dance, and they *eat*.

Share: What events do we celebrate? Do we celebrate some events differently? Do we ever find ourselves “dancing wildly in the streets” like David?

Read Luke 1:46-55

An angel has come to Mary and told her that she is pregnant with Jesus. Even if you discount the “This is the Son of God” angle, it could be terrifying news. There's the strong possibility that Joseph, upon learning of her pregnancy, will break off the engagement. There's also the possibility that Mary's family might disown her or even engage in an “honor-killing”.

It's a precarious situation to be in. Mary goes to visit some relatives and as she finds her cousin Elizabeth, the child in Elizabeth's womb (John the Baptist) leaps for joy upon recognizing Jesus.

So Mary sings in celebration...

1. Does it seem odd to celebrate in such precarious circumstances? What makes Mary able to celebrate?
2. Have you ever found yourself celebrating in an otherwise hard time? What's that been like?
3. What are the characteristics of the God Mary is celebrating? What is it she celebrates about God?
4. Is our worship a celebration of that God? Do we celebrate the same things as Mary? Are there ways we feel it could be more of a celebration?

Read Luke 15:11-32

The father's response as his "prodigal son" looms into view seems to be incredibly joyful and spontaneous. A man concerned with dignity and honor would wait for his son to present himself, listen to the apology, and then with sorrowful eyes, give him a little to live on or turn him away. Instead, as his son bears into view the father runs to meet him (an undignified pursuit as it tends to involve holding up your robe as you run) and immediately puts a ring on his finger and kills the fatted calf.

The older son is justifiably annoyed. It's no surprise that he's not keen to jump in to the celebration. The father's response? "We *had* to celebrate because your brother was dead and now is alive... he was lost and now he's found."

1. Who do you identify with in this story? Is the person you identify with different at different times?
2. Do you think the older son feels he "has to celebrate"?
3. We don't hear about the younger son's response... What do you think is going on for him emotionally?
4. Have there been times you've been called to celebrate and really not felt like it? Have there been other times you've been incredibly joyful and then realised that those around you are not celebrating?
5. In light of this parable, go back and look at Mary's song of celebration. Can you see parallels in the God she's singing about and the God Jesus is talking about here?

Prayer

As a Christian faith community, we recognize the importance of spending time as individuals or as a group in prayer – meditating on the grace and power of God to move in the lives of those for whom we pray.

Prayer plays an essential part in the context of this Season of Celebration and Thanksgiving. When we pray, perhaps we do so understanding that we are in direct communication – or connection - with God. So, what better time to give thanks? What better time to name the things for which we give thanks and to recognize God's part in them?

Prayer can take whatever shape or form you wish it to and it is important to understand that whilst you and/or your group are praying, so to are others in our community. It may be that some members of your group don't subscribe to the conventional notion of prayer. Where that's the case, it may be useful to encourage them to spend time thinking about things we all celebrate and in the context of their belief, encourage celebration.

Some may find it difficult to pray or lead prayer publically and that's okay. You may wish to use these words as a guide, or to break the ice.....

Loving God

We bring before you our prayers of celebration and thanksgiving for the many gifts you bring.

We give thanks for those things big and small that impact in our hearts and in our lives. We give thanks for friends and strangers who in some way touch our lives in positive ways. We celebrate these people and we give thanks.

We celebrate the world around us, the things of nature that make us draw breath. We pray for their protection and celebrate their gifts.

We celebrate community and global change – change that promotes justice, peace and compassion among the people of the world. We pray for those who still await the celebration of peace and hope. Visit them in celebration with your gift of grace.

Loving God. Open our eyes, ears, hands and hearts to the many gifts you bring. Open our mouths in thanksgiving and open our hearts in celebration!

In your name Lord, we pray

Amen

Prayer points

The following 'prayer points' are not exhaustive, but may assist in guiding your praying:

We celebrate:

- *Gifts in our family lives*
- *God's presence in our hearts*
- *Times when we find hope where there appears to be none*
- *Times when we feel the support of friends or strangers*
- *The things that make us smile or laugh*
- *The work of those who heal*
- *The work of those who make a positive difference in the world*
- *Those things big and small that give us a glimpse of God's presence with us*

The miracle of silent prayer.

Consider silent prayer and meditation. As a group or individual, don't be afraid to allow groups periods of silence during which those who are present can allow themselves to focus on whatever they feel is important.

Outreach

We are hopeful that you and your group will decide on some sort of outreach activity that expresses a state of celebration. The choice of outreach activity and the extent to which your group engages this, is wholly the decision of you and/or your group. It may be as big or as small as you decide.

In addition to being an 'inward focussed' thing, celebration is of course, also an outward looking thing. Where and how can we create celebration in the lives of others?

It is hoped that you or your group will embrace the outreach part of this process as it presents possibilities for very real positive change for others and as such, represents a critical part of ministry in the name of Christ.

Recognize that in outreach, we are dealing with other people – some we know, some we don't. Ensure that actions we do for other people either directly or indirectly, are done with their permission. If dealing with a person or an organization, obtain permission first. Always respect other people's privacy and right to confidentiality.

Create

You are invited to contribute to the season's topic creatively. This could mean music, artwork, craftwork, poetry, drama etc. How do you celebrate creatively? Its exciting here to consider the possibilities for creative response, and once again, groups or individuals are invited to engage in this part of the process in whatever way they feel comfortable.

Celebration

At the conclusion of the Autumn Season and our focus on celebration and thanksgiving, it would be great for your group to celebrate the journey and any outcomes that have been experienced. Celebration can take whatever form your group wishes it to. It may extend simply to a quiet prayer of thanks, through to a presentation or celebration in worship.

Towards the end of the 'Autumn season', the Leadership Group will be in touch to see how you might wish to celebrate.

Finally.....

We encourage your group to embrace the possibilities of *Seasons*. If you require further information or assistance, please get in touch with one of the Leaders.

Finally, we give thanks to God for the talents and energies of our people.

Coatesville Leadership Group