

Talking Cents

April 2015

Talking Cents is an ecumenical group charged by the Anglican Diocesan Council to promote an alternative to current economic and political thought, and to encourage debate within the Church. Ministry units are encouraged to distribute these articles. This article is contributed by Peter Bargh, from the Anglican Social Justice Group.

He is Risen Indeed!

Christ is Risen!

The Paschal greeting will be the catch cry of Christians the world over from the fifth of April (or the twelfth of April for Orthodox Christians); an age old Easter proclamation of faith, hope and Good News.

This high point of the Christian year comes at the culmination of Lent, the preceding time of privation and preparation. Lent is often one of the times when contemporary Christians engage in periods of devotional study and reflection as they seek to pay heed to the way of God and how God is at work in the world.

Last month's *Talking Cents*, "Seeking to incarnate a vulnerable God – Learning from St Francis of Assisi," contributed by David Tutty, entered fully into the Lenten spirit. In it he drew attention to how seeking to incarnate vulnerability is a genuine way of incarnating God's love and compassion. David reflected on the way in which Francis sought to follow Christ. Francis discerned that his calling led him to choose to be vulnerable. This meant he 'embraced the most rejected in his society and rejected the wealth, privilege and comfort which his society most prized.'¹

Francis saw beyond the ways which dominated the world to God's way, which underpins creation. To incarnate this way Francis had to embrace poverty; the antithesis of societal norms – then and now.

It can be difficult to do what Francis did and see beyond the ways which dominate the world. This is, however, what we are called to do as Christians.

With the movement of the liturgical season, April sees us move through Holy Week and herald Easter, naturally draws our attention to time. The Easter proclamation of new life whilst heading into the colder, stormier part of our southern hemisphere year presents us with a disjunction and a reminder. We live not only with *chronos* – sequential time – but also *kairos* – God's appointed time. The disjunction of the southern hemisphere Easter proclamation reminds us that God's ways differ from those which dominate the world.

So how do we live out the Easter proclamation in a world which seems opposed to new life at this time of the year?

The March *Talking Cents* would suggest that we do so by seeking to incarnate vulnerability – something that is counter to our prevailing social norms.

Often, however, exactly what our social norms are can be difficult to discern. Our norms can seem clouded by sensationalized reporting or discussion of news and events. This can be evident in the dramatized context of reporting about dissatisfaction with sentences issued within our criminal justice system, coupled with hasty calls to apportion blame.

John Fairbrother argues that the Church has something to say to these sorts of issues. Rather than being reactionary, he suggests that Christian communities should be 'compassionate, reconciled and just communities.'² Thus, we are called upon to proactively incarnate vulnerability

¹ David Tutty's March 2015 TC.

² <http://vaughanpark.org.nz/?sid=589> John Fairbrother is the Director of the Vaughan Park Anglican Retreat and Conference at Long Bay.

in the lives of our communities – constituent members of the Body of Christ.

Those parts of the Church open to the hard, vulnerable journey to becoming compassionate, just and reconciled communities may already model and affirm a vision of justice which recognizes that ‘punishment alone will never secure justice.’³ This involves not simply seeing the world differently but seeking to live differently in it, just as Francis, and countless others, throughout the centuries have sought to do.

Generation Zero is one such group which is seeking to see things differently.⁴ They saw beyond the dichotomy presented for the future of Auckland transport in Auckland’s 10 year budget or *Long-term plan 2015-2025*. The plan would see Aucklanders choose to either ‘invest in transport infrastructure we can't afford’ or remain within the budget but fail to cater for transport needs.⁵ Generation Zero have instead proposed a well-received *via media*: the Essential Transport Budget.⁶

This approach reflects a different – and more hopeful– vision for Auckland’s future than those presented to us by council. It reveals a boldness and sense of engagement with important social issues which are often deemed to be lacking in society and young people in particular.

The Long-term Plan is important for a number of reasons and it touches on several other areas of significant interest, including Auckland ‘council’s role in housing and development.’⁷

³ Ibid.

⁴ <http://www.generationzero.org/> Generation Zero is a youth-led NZ organization, primarily focused on climate change. Generation Zero often not only suggests alternate proposals to issues but uses different channels and networks to promote their ideas.

⁵ http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11415669

⁶ Ibid. The Essential Transport Plan aims to ‘deliver the public transport improvements in the [more expensive option] but delaying non-essential projects to save money.’

⁷ <http://www.aucklandcouncil.govt.nz/EN/planspolicies/projects/plansstrategies/longtermplan2015/Pages/home.a>

Further, if this Lent has been anything to go by then this Eastertide should also witness further unfolding and oft-changing developments regarding the future of secure state housing in New Zealand. The government’s efforts to create a “social housing market” are in a state of flux since the Salvation Army recognized that they do not have the resources or capacity to take responsibility for large scale social housing in the then current proposal.⁸

Why is any of this important in seeking to incarnate vulnerability? In order to look beyond the ways of the world we must first have integrity in the way in which we seek to be aware of the depth of what is going on in the world. For those with eyes to see and ears to hear, we live not only in *chronos* but also with *kairos*. A different vision for the world involves us living our lives with different values.

The daily Principles of the Franciscans sum this up:

*We are ready to accept the lowest place when asked, and to volunteer to take it. Nevertheless, when asked to undertake work of which we feel unworthy or incapable, we do not shrink from it on the grounds of humility, but confidently attempt it through the power that is made perfect in weakness.*⁹

Responding in the way the Principles would have us do entails incarnating vulnerability – vulnerability centred on the hope-filled Easter acclamation that:

He is Risen Indeed!

http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11421462

⁸ http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11421462

⁹ *The Principles of the Third Order of the Society of Saint Francis*, Day 24. The reference to being “asked” can be understood literally as well as to the prayerful sense of being “called” to do something.