

Stable Leadership

I'm blowing bubbles because the Australian National Dictionary Centre has proclaimed that "Canberra Bubble" is the word of the year, a phrase championed by Prime Minister "ScoMo" (which fortunately isn't the word of the year), for the insular nature of Federal Politics, there is Canberra and there is the real world.

And that of course is how many would view Christmas. The stories of a baby, angels, stars, are just Christmas and then there is the real world. The idea of peace on earth beautiful but ephemeral and ungraspable as a bubble. Today I hope that we will burst that bubble and see that the truth of Christmas is far more durable and truly about the real world, that should impact the Canberra Bubble and any bubble that we live in. It is about a leadership challenge born in a back room.

STABLE LEADERSHIP

There is an irony of the idea of Canberra Bubble being the word of the year and it's not just that it is clearly two words which points to a basic failure of both Maths and English which may something about education policy in this country. Rather Canberra Bubble seems to describe the aspirations and indeed careers of so many of our political leaders, which are then gone. Moreover, at Federal, State and Local government level policies so often seem to be thought bubbles with no real substance or ethical centre.

It seems no better overseas as Brexit becomes Brokesit, Paris as both a city and a climate accord is in chaos, and stability does not seem to be a mark of the current US administration.

It is no surprise then that we are looking for stable leadership.

CHRISTMAS IS ABOUT STABLE LEADERSHIP

Christmas truly is about stable leadership.

If we listen carefully to the well-known readings of Christmas we hear that the child whose birth we celebrate is born as King (Matthew 2:2), the stories describe him as the son of God, who is given a throne, and an unending kingdom (Luke 1:31-33). He is called prince of peace, of whose government there is no end and will flourish because of justice and righteousness. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

This may seem to be the Christmas bubble, heart warming tales that may cheer our hearts but will burst against grimmer rocks of reality.

Yet these were claims that Jesus made in the real world in Israel 2000 years ago. As a grown man in his public ministry he issued a challenge to the political and religious leaders of the day as he told stories of the kingdom of God making it clear who the king was. They in turn, following an act of betrayal by a trusted friend, sought to burst this Jesus bubble and killed him for these claims, and he was crucified with his crime above his head, King of the Jews.

Yet when God raised Jesus from the dead he was declared to truly be the king who was now above all other authorities. In so doing he burst the Jerusalem Bubble, the Roman Bubble indeed all leadership bubbles.

The stories of Christmas and the rest of Jesus life, death and resurrection leave us in no doubt that in the birth of Jesus we have the stable leader who will bring justice and righteousness, whose kingdom will come on earth. The iconography of our Cathedral reminds of this: over the incarnation window is a crown, over Jesus crucified are the letters INRI which stand for the Latin initials of his crime of claiming to be king, and at the top of the East Window is Jesus crowned in heaven. This Cathedral proclaims in word and building Jesus as Lord, as King forever.

It is the birth of this stable leader that we celebrate this day.

A LEADER BORN IN A STABLE

But this leader is born in a stable, he comes in humility and this is born out in the rest of his life. Jesus came to serve, to give of himself for the good of others. Jesus is a leader who acts in love, compassion and mercy. He breaks out of any kind of leadership bubble and comes as one of us and gives himself in grace for us.

The stories of Christmas then are not only a challenge as to who is in charge but also what being in charge looks like.

This truly is a leadership challenge born in a back room.

CHALLENGE TO LEADERS AND US

Christmas calls us then to challenge any who live in a leadership bubble with the ways of Jesus, to be bringing about justice, working for peace, showing mercy, and practicing compassion.

So Christmas should lead us to call for our nation to be caring for refugees, the homeless, the poor and vulnerable, for all who society seems to have no room. Not, as the Mercury said, to show our humanity but because we follow the divinity, for Jesus shows us what it is to be truly human. Christmas should encourage Christians to burst out of their bubbles and call for change from our leaders. This may not be welcomed but it is our task to be faithful to our stable leader not to passing political regimes. A Chinese pastor, Wang Yi, was arrested by authorities earlier this month. He wrote to his Church to prepare them for this possibility and to keep the faith reminding that all authorities are ultimately unstable and passing "For on earth, there has only ever been a thousand-year church. There has never been a thousand-year government. There is only eternal faith. There is no eternal power".

But Christmas is also a challenge to us. Do we truly recognise who Jesus is and will we follow him? Will we burst our own bubble of self serving and self fulfilment to serve in humility, to stop standing up for our rights but looking to put things right for others and so follow in Jesus' ways of love and peace. Will we follow this stable leader?

COMFORT OUR STABLE LEADER

But there is not only challenge here but great comfort. For with a stable leader who is beyond challenge you can trust their policy position, it too is stable. And it is clear that his position towards us is one of love and salvation. For God so loved the world that he gave his Son that whoever believes him shall not perish but have eternal life. Jesus came to be God with us, to break down the wall between us and he is going to pay the cost, so that will be welcomed in.

And this has been the stable message of the Church through the ages. To update some words of the 16th Century Homily on the Nativity as they reflected on the Christmas story.

Christ became human not for any profit for himself but only for our sakes. ... He became a pilgrim on earth to make us citizens of heaven, who became the Son of Man so we could be children of God, became poor to make us rich, obedient so we could be forgiven, of no value to make us precious, subject to death so we could live forever.

If we doubt God's love for us then pondering these things about Jesus should bust that bubble.

Such love calls for a response, and not just for today but one that too is stable. The Homily for the Nativity ends "Let us receive Christ, not for a time, but for ever, let us believe his word, not for a time, but for ever, let us become his servants, not for a time, but for ever, in consideration that he hath redeemed and saved us, not for a time, but for ever, and will receive us into his heavenly kingdom, there to reign with him, not for a time, but for ever."

That is our stable leader giving stable salvation which is for all, there is plenty of room. This is something that we should truly celebrate and a great way to start is with bubbles.