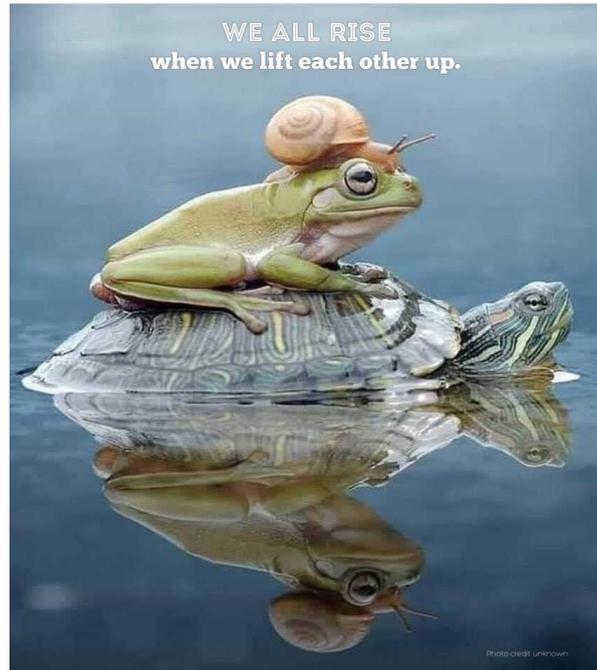


We All Rise When We Lift Each Other Up – Part 1



In the past few months we have been thinking and reflecting a lot on what it means to be church in the light of lockdown and being separated from everything and everyone we hold dear. We have been thinking how change makes us feel anxious, overwrought, and how it can be a time when we focus only on the difficulties and perhaps not see the bigger picture. Over the past few weeks, reflecting on what it means to be church and church family has been “ramped” up a little as we have opened the building for private prayer and we are now considering the “when” and the “how” of safely coming back to worship together.

This past week I have been reading a very beautiful and profound book – “The Sacred Heart of the World: Restoring Mystical Devotion to our Spiritual Life.” – this deeply penetrating work encourages the reader through reflection to come ever closer to the sacred heart of Jesus. That is, to seek to fully understand how an open heart, willing to sacrifice and love beyond all measure is freeing not just for ourselves, but for all of humanity.

So much of this resonated with me. It feels perhaps more poignant because we have been living with that uneasy feeling of disconnectedness for almost four months – we have not been able to live in community in the same way. We have been able to write about it, but those are only words, living it is a very different matter.

In the book, we are reminded that in Paul’s letter to the Philippians (Phil 2:7) Jesus emptied himself. That is, he “did not present himself as a single solitary self but as a self-in-representation to God and to us.”

That was in chapter two. The text is so rich and powerful that it's taken me a week to read this far! If I don't read the rest of the book then I believe that single sentence contains enough wisdom to change hearts.

We are reminded that if we are to truly follow Christ's example, if we really do want to live with open hearts and follow God's call on our lives, then we must shed our ego and need to be the "best one" or "the only one" and recognise that our wholeness only be found through true connectedness.

Our individual relationship with God and oneself is important, but we must also understand that the setting for this relationship is within the community all of God's people. The author tells us that: "our spiritual challenge is to remember ourselves within the mystical body of humanity." What does that mean? It means that we need to remember we are part of a team – "The God Squad" if you like. That it's not all about us. It means that we need not fight so hard within ourselves or with others for our individual wants and desires, but instead work to be fully connected, a real team player and live that connectedness looking to Jesus as the example to follow.

It can be profoundly liberating. Freeing us from the anxiety of the constant striving and from the weariness of nonstop grasping. But it requires a great deal of work, to developing our self-awareness and more importantly a willingness to move beyond our simple behaviours.

It means choosing a commitment to working not just for the good of oneself, but for the good of all. Without exception. It means choosing to put oneself aside, and to think about really sharing with others.

I encourage you to take time to really reflect on this, as I am, this week and to take the challenge of looking deeper. Think about Jesus as the example of wholeness and connectedness.

Take a little time out of the day today, sit quietly and allow yourself to look deeper. Think and pray with these questions:

- Am I living in a way that is truly connected to others?
- What behaviour draws me closer to Jesus' heart?
- What does not. What behaviour takes me away from being close to Jesus' heart?
- Am I truly sharing with others?

Hold yourself gently in this. Remember that God loves you unconditionally. It is not about blame or feeling less of yourself. It is about coming closer to God and to those around you. Know that God holds you in his loving arms. So be honest, but hold yourself gently. We are only human, but we can make choices to not live in full connectedness or to move past our human behaviours and closer to God.

Bring your difficulties to God this day – the places or people with whom connectedness is difficult. Recognise your own place in those relationships and ask for God's help.

Bring it all before God in prayer.

Trust that he will show you the way to transform it from disconnectedness to wholeness. Choose to be part of the team. Not just for yourself but for everyone. We all rise when we lift each other up.