

Reflection on Holiness.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. [2Corinthians 3.17-18; 4.6]

Rowan Williams chapter on holiness embraces a faith in which both the withdrawal and engagement within our relationship with God, can be held in tension. We begin to understand this by seeing how holiness is expressed in the two Testaments.

The Old Testament portrays a narrative that has the tendency to make us feel we must keep our distance from God. It begins with God creating his garden. Which becomes a symbol for life as God intends it to be. A place that is contentment, rest and calm. Full of abundant provision for life and peace.

It is also a place of ambiguity. Two trees are planted. One is the tree of knowledge, the second is the tree of good and evil. God says = *Do not eat from any tree in the garden.*

From this point our journey epitomises the values and qualities in our intimate relationship with God. Rowan Williams offers two examples that evoke this jarring disharmony as though something has gone wrong.

Moses meets God at the burning bush. Yet he felt the impact of God's powerful intrusion of His will and purpose.

"Come no closer. Remove the sandals from your feet for the place on which you are standing is holy ground."

When the people came to Mount Sinai, they are warned not to get too close. *"set limits around the mountain and keep it holy.*

Like those warning signs on electricity pylons; keep away. "Danger of Death." Looking at other warning signs that speak of this expression I noticed "Warning Antimatter." The risk of mixing the divine and materialistic world!

This narrative locked away. Apart from family friends going to church/ meeting church family almost a distant memory does not describe a well- balanced life between social and sacred dimensions. Left in this place risks becoming

frustrated, engaging in dangerous gossiping or go on a fault- finding mission. Power games which cause disillusioned people to walk away.

When we enter into the New Testament, holiness takes a shift in expression. It is now about you, me. Human holiness. All our senses kick in. because now we can see, hear smell touch and taste God through Christ Jesus. It begins echoing God's invite Come. Each called by name. Accepting the invite leads into a life that marks Christ's nature within experiences of radical hospitality and being a social reformer.

We are beginning to see holiness as a life time searching the root of holiness that began in God's garden. Seeking the gracious and controversial God means life will not always be cosy, comfortable and warm. Accepting God is the supreme holiest of holy, who gives us everything we need to be disciples. Accepting Christ gives us everything we need to be strong in the messiness of life. Accepting our call is to pass on the gift of ourself. We do this in our hungering for righteousness. Enabling others to experience the revelations that will liberate them into ways of fresh starts.

Our willingness to walk on this holy ground means we will suffer persecution because of it. Mocked for building bridges. Ridiculed for leaving people seeing and wanting to have this life that belongs to God.

There is another side belongs to feeling apart from God. Belongs to self-examination. A time Christ holds our attention to the mirror into our inner life. Opens us to the truth as to whether we are or not in tune with God's image. The fear is seeing how far we have travelled from God.

Both the Old and New Testaments help us understand God entrusts Christ to us. Christ entrusts himself to us. We entrust ourselves to others through discipleship. Paul's letters highlight these elements. Once Paul was attacking God's nature in negative ways. At God's timing God challenged Paul to turn the other way. At first Paul expressed Christ as "with me". As he moved through life this changed to "Christ in me" This shift of expression demonstrates faith moves. Paul himself is changing.

He wants to ensure Christ's values are passed on. His letters begin with the encouragement to his friends.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother,

to the church of God that is in Corinth, including all the saints throughout Achaia:

*Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus,
To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are in Philippi,*

Faith also asks us to learn from others who live through Christ's nature. People who say and do what we need to hear and see. These people are not saints. They have saintly values and attitudes. Rowan Williams shares the impact on meeting Desmond Tutu. Desmond Tutu showed Rowan Williams he loved being Desmond Tutu. Not in a competitive way. Not in a way he thought he was better than Rowan Williams. But in a way that left Rowan Williams feeling he wanted to feel that good living as Rowan Williams.

Christ informs us the key to living well is held in prayer – Jesus knowing we will need to be strong to walk on holy ground offers a prayer on our behalf to the father at the last supper. *“I am asking on their behalf; ...Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. {John 17.17}*

What follows is Christ's crucifixion. The ending of His earthy journey. An event that took place in the most unholy place. Outside the holy city on top of rubbish. In full view for all to mock and gloat. This is Christ, the holiest of holy, being wholly involved in people's pain and agony.

Holiness goes right to the heart of transforming. A life speaks and acts of God's grace belongs to his moral and ethical values. Brexit. Trade deals. Empty food shelves. Vaccination programme restrictions looming unjust voices of holy week discussions on how to emerge in balance between secular and sacred spaces, it is a good place to embrace our mirror. Both in personal and community levels. Hindsight of seeing the revelations that liberated us into ways of fresh starts. To see the chapters in our story are tiny blinks of the eye. Each experience is a speck of soil being planted in God's gigantic story. As one chapter ends another one starts.

Holiness is the grace to give appropriate value a worth that we highly honour. There will be unexpected turns. Episodes of fear. Episodes of reaffirming. Life in prayer flows from the cross. Then when our story arrives in God's end garden we can with confidence look fully into God's glory.

A holy life is giving ourselves to God through His grace.