

Reading: Matthew 6:25-34

Signs are very important.

The driver in front came to a sudden stop to let the children go across the crossing. The driver behind was enraged. He tooted his horn, waved his middle finger at the driver, and then passed at speed at the next opportunity. Unbeknownst to him some distance off a police officer was watching. She put on her siren and quickly caught up with the furious driver. She handcuffed him and arrested him for stealing the car. "But it's my car the angry driver insisted. What makes you think I stole the car?" The officer explained, "I'm so sorry. I saw the signs on the back of your car: 'Toot if you love Jesus', 'Follow me to Sunday School' and 'I love being an Anglican' and thought it must be stolen."

Today is our Spring Celebration. It's wonderful after a difficult winter to see signs of God's new life all around us. We had to abandon getting together with our Methodist neighbours because of the 100 limit, but we can have fun on our own. Jesus offers some signs of God's Spring faithfulness today for us in the gospel. Lilies and birds. In this beautiful corner of God's world, we could add lambs and daffodils, grass and warmer, longer days. Jesus is using God's creation as a sign of God's faithfulness and as an antidote to worry. Rita Snowdin, a New Zealand poet, put it like this:

*God's world is conceived in hope,
Dawn follows darkness,
Spring follows the leaf-strewn way of winter
The world is born anew in every child,
The resurrection lies just beyond what we call death.*

Dawn, spring, and newborns all point to a deeper reality of new life and hope.

In the church when something everyday points beyond itself to God's hope and love it goes by a special name. We call it a sacrament. A sacrament is an outward and visible sign of an inward and spiritual grace. That is how our catechism defines it. The Anglican church has two sacraments given by Jesus - baptism and the Eucharist. The outward visible sign of baptism is of course water, and the outward visible sign of the Eucharist is of course the bread and wine. In baptism we are made a child of God. In the Eucharist we are made into that which we eat - the body of Christ. We also have five sacramental actions. Reconciliation which used to be called confession, anointing for healing and wholeness, marriage, confirmation, and ordination. Sacraments are so cool; they are like icebergs. We see only the small top, but underneath is a much bigger and deeper truth, as the Captain of the Titanic can tell you.

Over the centuries the church has spent long hours arguing over what a sacrament is. Why, for example, isn't foot washing a sacrament? Jesus commanded it and it has a deeper truth - our call to service. Why only 7 sacraments why not 7 times 77? I like to think of the whole universe being a sacrament of God's love to us. We live in a sacramental universe. What we see and smell and hear and taste can all be signs of God's faithfulness. God breaks into our lives in the most seemingly ordinary things. Offered in love, the simplest thing takes on deeper meaning.

Two weeks ago, we partnered with Anglican care to visit blocks of housing units between, Curletts Road, Blenheim Road, Hansons Lane and Main South Road. Over four days we visited 476 homes. Among the things we offered were free lights bulbs. These light bulbs last thirty years and save you 25 dollars a year on your power bill. We offered to arrange an evaluation of their power bill to save them big money, told them about the church and preschool, offered to advocate with Housing NZ, and shared about the availability of mental health support. But the most important thing we did was simply ask, "How are you?" "How are you?" Janet the organiser said that of all the parishes she has worked with we had the biggest and the best team. No surprises there. What surprised

me the most was how grateful people were to simply be asked *how are you?* And then to have someone listen. I think that for us a light bulb or five to each house given freely in love became a sacrament of care and was just as God infused as any bread or wine.

Jesus himself was a living sacrament. As far as we know he was just an ordinary looking man and yet behind the ordinary outward and visible sign was a deeper meaning. Often we struggle to understand how Jesus could be both God and a human being. A sacramental approach helps us.

If you have ever watched a really good pianist at work you have caught a glimpse. From the moment they start playing their whole being is set with the task of bringing you the music. They are somehow at one with the piano, all their concentration and the movement of their hands is focused on bringing you the Beethoven. So it was with Jesus, his task was not to play the piano but to be God's love in the world. He and God are one, and his whole being was at work bringing and being the love of God.

Joy Cowley, another New Zealand poet, puts the sacrament of Jesus like this:

*You, Springtime Jesus,
just as I'd settled down for winter,
you broke into my heart
and danced your love right across it
in a mad excess of giving.
Just as I'd got comfortable
with bare branches and unfeeling,
just as my world was neatly black and white,
there you were,
kicking up flowers
all over the place.
Springtime Jesus,*

*I tried to find a way to tell you
that there were places
where you could or would not dance.
I wanted to guide you on my paths
and have you sign the visitors' book;
but you laughed right through my words
and sang to me your melting song,
causing sap to fire the branches,
causing the flames of buds
to flicker into green bonfires,
causing a windquake of blossom,
causing burstings, searings, breakings,
causing growth-pain,
causing life.*

*Teach me, Jesus, how to move with you,
step for step, in your love dance.
Touch my fears with your melting song.
Gift me with your laughter,
and, in the mystery of your Springtime,
show me the truth of the blossoming Cross.*

In all this talk of Spring and trees and sacraments and Jesus we could be in danger of missing another of God's great signs of love to the world. You. Together with the church, the family of God, you are God's great sign of hope and love to a broken world. We are a living sacrament, an outward and visible sign of an inner and invisible grace. Does the world need this sign? Does it ever! If it seems daunting, remember that we don't do it alone but together. Together we are a beacon of hope, together we are a sign of God's faithfulness, together we are a sign that God is with us and will never forsake us.