

Genesis 3:1-10

Psalm 32

Mark 16:1-8

Peace after Light

Another week, another violation of a ceasefire, another woman dead because a man thought she crossed a line, another despairing suicide. So it seems to go. For the most part, these things wash over us, for we are accustomed to the presence of death.

On any ordinary day, of course, our own failures or excesses are generally much less dramatic than all that. Yet here too we are constantly assimilating and normalising human frailty and failure.

In Christian thinking, human weakness has generally fallen under the catch-all category of “sin”. Sin has encompassed simple “naughtiness” at the trivial end of its spectrum, through to total depravity at the oppressive end.

But, in the book many of us considered in our recent Lenten studies, theologian Rowan Williams beautifully undercuts this too-easy moralising of sin: “Our failures are all about our wanting to be somewhere else”.¹ Sin is about our unwillingness to be true to where we are and to do the things which are demanded of us here; our problem is we are too often simply unable to be “present”. Marital infidelity seeks to be “somewhere else” than with this person and what he or she needs or can give. “Just one more episode” shifts us into another place where there are no phone calls, visits, or housework awaiting our attendance. Comfort food and escaping into retail therapy are very much our strong desire to be elsewhere.

By such means, we strike a bargain in life by which we settle for a shrunken world and experience, what Williams calls “peace before light”. This is a peace in which we escape into a relatively safe space by denying inconvenient truths about ourselves in the world. It is a kind of peace, in the sense that we survive. But it’s not an illuminated or liberated life.

Another week, another broken ceasefire, another buried truth, another crucifixion. So it seems to go.

The responses of Jesus’ friends to his arrest and crucifixion – their desertion of him in particular – can also be seen to be assimilations and rationalisations. They too wanted to be “somewhere else”. We can imagine the confused self-justifications of those who had been so close to Jesus and so bravely imagined that they would stick with him: *I had to do it. I couldn’t stop them. It was only enough that I could save myself.*

And then comes the sad existence of the mere survivor. Now it is *done*, is *passed*, can’t be changed. And so I must find a way to live with myself. Life without truth. Peace without light.

There is tragedy in the way we grow accustomed to living with the corpses of missed opportunities – things taken from us or things we have denied ourselves because we

¹ Rowan Williams, *Christ on trial: how the gospel unsettles our judgement*. (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 2003), p.133.

have not been able to be where we are, because we have missed the moment out of a desire to be somewhere else. Peace before light.

But what if the corpse of one of our missed opportunities were to *move*? What if that which we have somehow managed to put to death for ourselves *refuses to remain dead* but rather returns to us? What if our dead refuse to confirm our version of how we have come to be where we are, why we are justified in our failures, why we had reason to be afraid, why it we though it *necessary* to deny what we truly believe?

Were one of our buried failures to move, to return to us, then a new possibility emerges: peace *after* light. This light would be a piercing one, cutting through every shade of grey, causing us to squint for its brilliance. To borrow language from Mark's gospel this morning, this is a light which would see us to turn and flee from the tomb, "for fear and amazement had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid".

Why this strange response to what is supposed to be overwhelmingly *good* news?
