

Pentecost 4 2024 All Souls **A NEW CREATION IN CHRIST** dtw

Ross Jones was a butcher and a farmer at Manjimup in the south-west of WA. His wife, Lynn, used to attend the local Anglican Church, St Martin's with her young children. Ross never went; he was effectively an atheist and a proud, self-sufficient man. On Easter Eve, 1981, Lynn persuaded Ross to join her and the children at the Vigil Eucharist that evening. It changed his life. The reconciling love of the crucified and raised Christ flooded the soul of that proud man as the New Fire was lit and the people renewed their baptismal promises. In the imagery of today's Gospel, the seed of Lynn's vicarious faith had been growing secretly and sprouted in her husband's heart. That very night Ross went home a Christian; less than 2 years later he was at Wollaston Theological College in Perth, then ordained a deacon in Bunbury Cathedral in 1985, becoming my first assistant curate in Mt Barker, WA that same year. Not only did Ross get converted; he also discovered that he had a brain, having originally bombed out of school. He devoured theology with a passion; I often found him with his head in book after book and that passion has never left him. It pervades his preaching, his pastoring and his heart for evangelism. In the beautiful words of Paul in today's epistle, Ross became a new creation, for 'if anyone is in Christ there is a new creation; everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new.' (2 Cor 5. 17) He is currently Diocesan Director of Spirituality at the Wollaston Centre.

Francis of Assisi had a similar experience. Francis Bernadone was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. For the first twenty years of his life he experienced and then pursued pleasure, comfort and self-glorification in the chivalry of the times. He remained unsatisfied until three experiences called him into another path. A leper on a bridle path called Francis to embrace the suffering and ugliness of the world. Francis kissed the leper and the leper was Christ for him. En route to war a voice called to Francis to leave the service of a temporal lord and serve the Lord of lords. In the then ruins of St Damiano's church, which Deborah and I visited in 2007, the crucified Christ called Francis to rebuild the church. Francis became a new creation. And the seed sown in his heart would sprout and grow a thousand fold in the world-wide Franciscan movement, along with the followers of his spiritual companion, Clare, founder of the Poor Clares.

Luke's Gospel (Ch 7) records a woman going to a house where Jesus came to dine with a Pharisee named Simon. The woman is described as a 'sinner' which almost certainly means prostitute. I believe that this woman had done it tough all her life; she had been rejected by many people, perhaps even her own family. Her only valuable possession was a precious jar of perfumed ointment which she lavished over Jesus with tears. I believe that this was the only man who had accepted her, not her body but the whole person. He forgave her. This woman became a new creation, while Simon the host was scandalised. I wrote a poem in which I took the liberty of identifying her with Mary Magdalene. Some scholars do; some don't. I read it in thanksgiving for all new creations in Christ and the harvest of new life: *The Scent of a Woman...*

A patronising kind of gesture by a bloke called Simon
Inviting him to dinner with all the trimmings and lace
A certain woman of the night gate-crashed the occasion
And made an embarrassing fool of herself so it seemed

She stood behind this unusual guest at his feet weeping
Bathed his feet with her tears, dried them with her hair
Kissed them and massaged them with precious ointment
The whole house was filled with the fragrance of love

If only he knew the kind of woman she is, thought Simon
He wouldn't be letting her do this to him in a fit
But with this man she found forgiveness and acceptance
For the first time in her life she was free like a bird

A glutton and drunkard, friend of sinners and sluts
Is how they accused him for his justice and mercy
But she was a new creation, the old self was past
From her cocoon of rejection, a butterfly appeared

She was there in the garden on that glorious morning
When the stone of his tomb had been rolled away
He told her not to hold on, for he too must be free
For the rumour and fragrance to transform the world

Perhaps you too have a story of new life to tell? Or is there someone you know who has the potential to become a new creation if only you could lead them to spiritual water, like Lynn did with Ross? Where could you plant seeds of faith? We can all be 'spiritual midwives'. It's as easy as an invitation to worship in this place or a study group or a friendly meal. This again, is what *Hope 25* is all about.

Ireneaus in the 2nd century wrote 'The glory of God is a human being fully alive'. O, that people would experience being fully alive in Christ. Imagine this parish as an instrument for the birthing of new creations. What a privilege. What a joy!