



## **Boardwalks and Bogs Bishop Ross Bay**

18 April 2024

Induction of  
the Reverend Richard Bonifant

We've had one of our old friends from parish youth group days staying with us this last week. Andrew went off to the UK most of 40 years ago and decided to stay, so it's always good to see him when he gets to come home or when we are there.

Back in the day we did a lot of tramping together and the other night he was remembering a tramping story from Tongariro National Park. We were doing the round the mountain track and on the first day one of our number fell and hurt their arm. They were happy to keep going and none of us thought it was too serious. Only when we got back home and they went to the doctor did we find out they actually had broken their arm - pretty stoic of them to keep going.

A lot of the time some of us would take turns at carrying their pack to ease the stress on their arm. And so Andrew's story was about this one day when we were making our way through marshland near the Whakapapaiti Stream where there are good boardwalks. Andrew and I were taking a turn with the pack between us, but actual.ly the boardwalk wasn't really wide enough for 2 people side by side and a pack in between.

The inevitable happened and it was me who went off the edge. Turned out the marsh was thigh deep and quite boggy. I needed help to be pulled out, but I think not before someone grabbed a quick photo of my predicament. I guess I've got that photo somewhere. The Whakapapaiti marshlands have forever been known as the Bay Bog in our small circle.

So having been reminded of that story the other day, and then seeing the photo Richard had offered for the cover of the liturgy tonight, I decided that there must be a metaphor here that I couldn't ignore.

I'm not big on the journey motif-I think it's been a bit overworked and I sometimes inwardly cringe when I hear it emerging in liturgy or preaching. At the risk of making myself cringe then . . . .

But in fact we have read from Luke tonight, and so in spite of my views on the journey motif, I have to acknowledge that there is one woven through that gospel. The whole of Jesus' ministry is set in the context of a journey from Galilee to Jerusalem. It carries into the Acts of the Apostles, a book which it's generally accepted that Luke wrote as well. There is frequent use there of believers being described as "people of the Way" continuing to travel with Jesus in the life they share.

Among the numerous resurrection narratives, the one we read from Luke on the road to Emmaus is up there for me. It has wonderful lines like "Were not our hearts burning within us", and beautiful images like Jesus being known in the breaking of bread.

When I had the privilege of being part of a pilgrimage in Israel a few years ago, we made a visit to Emmaus. At least it was one of the many places that could have been Emmaus, because no one is really sure where this ancient town was. That just adds to the narrative for me, because it brings an additional mystical quality to the whole encounter.

Wherever it was we are told that it was 7 miles from Jerusalem so I guess that's a good couple of hours or so walk. Travel between towns in the 1<sup>st</sup> century was a risky thing, especially on foot, and people would try to stay in groups and avoid going at night. The parable of the good Samaritan reminds us of the risks of travelling alone.

Not unusual then for a solo traveller to join another group and for a friendship to strike up through conversation as they tried to make sense together of everything that had just happened in Jerusalem. No surprise either that Cleopas and his companion discouraged this new friend from carrying on alone now that the evening was drawing in.

The surprise comes that after these astounding events of recognising Jesus and his sudden disappearance they are compelled to return to Jerusalem straight away in spite of the inherent dangers of travelling at night. Such is the impact of what has just happened.

This Emmaus walk, our old Tongariro walk, is redolent for me of images of what life together in a parish community can be, of things we can aspire to.

There's the whole thing of being safe in our togetherness, of companionship along the way adding to hauora, our wellbeing, through the sharing of burdens and the working out of things by processes of korero and talanoa, discerning together just what the Spirit is saying to us.

Whanaungatanga and manaakitanga are two of the aspects of life to which you aspire to grow more deeply into as you welcome people and offer acceptance and belonging and become people of the Way, following Christ together.

And that's a way that is not without risk. Sometimes we are compelled by the revelation of Christ to step into the night where the path is less obvious and where the dangers are not so easily seen. That has long been a mark of St Matthew's, to identify those spaces and have the courage to journey in them to be able to proclaim to others just what it is that you have seen and experienced.

The bog is never far away and sometimes we can find ourselves dropping into it. There's two ideas there - it's easy to get bogged down when the way is less certain; and we can end up in the ... bog (because I shouldn't use the ruder word when I'm being live streamed)

That's where companions along the way are so critical- to help to find the right path, to pull us out when the bog surrounds us. The crucial nature of community, walking together, talking together, finding our way.

This family now comes among you to be part of all of that, and with Richard to take up the role of Vicar to be alongside you and you alongside him, pilgrims together making sense of God's world, of this particular community with all its challenges and opportunities as you seek to be part of God's life breathing into it all.

The last part of the metaphor I want to highlight is from Emmaus where Jesus was known in the breaking of bread. You are a strongly Eucharistic community. Your worship life is a key mark of who you are, and a source of energy for all that you seek to do. As Christian people it helps us to

tell our most important story which is about the self-giving love of God shown to us in Jesus Christ.

It's a love that John's letter tells us has its source in God, a perfect love which never conveys fear, which is seen in the way we treat one another, welcome one another, care for one another. It's a love that you describe here as indiscriminate love.

It's a love that I know Richard seeks to challenge and encourage the Church to understand and express more fully. God's love is perfect. Our's never will be. But we can aspire and strive to grow more deeply into it. We will learn more and more what it means to know and show God's love by staying on the way together, making space for one another, welcoming all.

Tonight a new chapter opens and we hear God calling us to step together again into new spaces, some of which may be risky, and to do so confident of the perfect, indiscriminate love which surrounds and holds us.