



***Sparks in the stubble***  
**Reverend Judith Wigglesworth**  
**33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time**  
**13 November 2016**  
***Malachi 4:1-2a***  
***2 Thessalonians 3:6-13***  
***Luke 21:5-19***

Last Sunday morning as members of St Alban's gathered to worship at our mother church, the Cathedral, one of our parishioners, who had also been at the diocesan hui the previous day, remarked: 'We should have brought our sleeping bags!'

For those who ventured into the city twice last weekend, it was a real feast of fellowship and worship. I witnessed many wonderful connections as a result of chance encounters and serendipitous conversations on both the Saturday and the Sunday.

It's hard to describe the buzz at the hui on Saturday – which has come to be described as the “family reunion” of the diocese. Imagine if you can the main body of the Cathedral transformed into a bustling market place, with a myriad of stalls, booths, and conversation corners. Many of these focused on the three diocesan goals of deepening discipleship, reducing child poverty, and reducing transport emissions. There were plenty of ideas for how each of us can make a difference: there were stalls focusing on supporting refugees, the Wellington City Mission, conservation and tree planting; there were electric bikes to try out, and even an electric car. Among the many activity centres there was a stall with sewing machines where you could make tote bags out of recycled pillow cases and men's ties, and a stall where you cleverly fold newspaper to bundle up vegetable seedlings, and much more. We

stopped every hour or so as we all paused to come together for worship, singing and prayer. The whole place was pulsating with life and connection.

There were also quiet peaceful spaces at the hui. There were rooms for quiet coffee and chat, for contemplation and prayer. One space that particularly drew me in was the sanctuary of the cathedral, full of thousands of origami paper cranes, symbols of peace, set up by the Porirua Hospital chaplaincy. You could pause at the altar rail and gaze upon the waves of paper cranes, you could make one yourself, or you could write your own prayer for peace or for anything that was on your heart. The sanctuary was a haven of peace in the midst of the busyness and buzz beyond it.

By the time we returned on Sunday morning for worship, the paper cranes remained, but the body of the cathedral was transformed to its more familiar layout, ready for Sunday morning worship. Our St Alban's parishioners filled several rows as we gathered for Choral Morning Worship on the theme of the Care of Creation. We gathered with parishioners from the cathedral and beyond as we worshipped through prayer and song, uplifted through the choir's glorious singing filling every corner of the cathedral.

Rod Oram, who had spoken at our diocesan Synod in September, preached powerfully of the invitation and responsibility we have as Christians to live and act with care for God's creation. He spoke of many things we can do to make a difference, reminding us that if an infinite number of people make an infinitesimal effort to do something, that makes a huge difference. In the end, though, he said that there is just **one** thing we need to do: that is, dedicate ourselves to establishing and maintaining a deep, strong, active and real relationship with God. And if we are really committed to that, a sense of care, concern, and reverence for God's creation will follow naturally.

Rod concluded his sermon with a quote from a sermon for All Saints Day 2006, given by the Most Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori, former Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church in the USA.

She referred to a passage from the Wisdom of Solomon:

*“In the time of their visitation they (the souls of the righteous) will shine forth, and will run like sparks through the stubble.” (Wisdom of Solomon 3:7).*

She went on to say:

*“When the saints turn up...they begin to burn and set the world alight... All the saints are meant to run like sparks through the stubble, through that dead and no longer fruitful stuff, the dross of this world. You and I are supposed to get lit and set that flame to burning by our willingness to be vulnerable to the suffering around us... Let the pain of this world seize us by the throat. Listen for Jesus calling us all out of our tombs of despair and apathy... This place we call home is meant to be a new heaven, a new earth, a holy city, a new Jerusalem. It is the sparks in the stubble that will make it so.”*

Doesn't this link in beautifully with our reading today from the book of the prophet Malachi? He envisions the day when all who revere God's name will rise with healing in their wings over the stubble of the earth. But we don't have to wait for that day when all creation will be healed: as Bishop Katharine said, we are called to be the sparks in the stubble now – faithful followers of God who do our bit to clear the way and light the fires to transform this world and all its brokenness into God's field for life, into God's vision of shalom.

My experience at the cathedral on those two days last weekend brought home to me the sheer breadth and depth of this call. As the hub of so much connectedness, creativity and worship, it reminded me of our call to connect deeply with one another, to inspire one another to action, and to be risk-takers and flame bearers.

In a week where the world's attention has focused on the results of the USA presidential election, I received one of my regular emails from the *London Institute for Contemporary Christianity*. This time the column was entitled 'Is God Fazed?' The author referred to a comment by a Christian leader back in June, in the context of the Brexit vote, that

'God is not fazed' by that whole ordeal. The implication was that we should not be fazed either, no matter the political climate.

Referring to this week's election, the author of this week's column commented:

*"I know that the reality of the Kingdom of God is that it will be present and grow under the direction of the King no matter what political declarations are made in our midst and across our world. God in his sovereignty cannot be undermined by our actions. But can we really separate out our faith from the rest of life like this? Do we really posit a God who is aloof to the things of humanity? Isn't God concerned, involved, even at work, in the affairs of people? Doesn't he care that people are confused and heartbroken? Do love and justice matter to him, regardless of our political leanings?"*

*Wherever you are in the world, and whether you had the ability to vote in the US election or not, I want to say this to you. GOD IS FAZED. He is fazed when we neglect our responsibility for the vulnerable. He is fazed when we turn our own way and do our own thing, because he loves us and longs for our well-being in relationship with him and each other. Surely Jesus' own tears for the city of Jerusalem, and his journey to the cross is evidence that he is fazed about our world, his world.*

*God's will is for the flourishing of people, and the conditions under which we may live and share our faith are crucial to what it means to live as a part of his creation, as well as the church. This day, instead of insisting on God's otherness, let's remember he is close. He is with us. He will walk with us into the coming days. He is able to help us to work out whatever needs to happen now with justice and wisdom. And he sends his church to be fazed, and to make a difference in the world, no matter what comes."*

We are indeed sent out to be sparks of light and life in the world. As Paul urged the Thessalonians: *"My friends, you must never tire of doing right"*.

Amen.