

Memorial Service for Kathleen Turner
December 6th, 2018. Church of the Resurrection, Mount Macedon

A reading from the Book of Ecclesiastes

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.

Matthew 15.1-11

Some Pharisees and scribes came to Jesus from Jerusalem and said, 'Why do your disciples break the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands before they eat.' He answered them, 'And why do you break the commandment of God for the sake of your tradition? For God said, "Honour your father and your mother," and, "Whoever speaks evil of father or mother must surely die." But you say that whoever tells father or mother, "Whatever support you might have had from me is given to God", then that person need not honour the father. So, for the sake of your tradition, you make void the word of God. You hypocrites! Isaiah prophesied rightly about you when he said:

"This people honours me with their lips,

but their hearts are far from me;

in vain do they worship me,

teaching human precepts as doctrines." '

Then he called the crowd to him and said to them, 'Listen and understand: it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.'

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It may seem, at first, to be an odd reading to have at a Memorial Service, but let's not kid ourselves, we're not talking about anyone else but Kathleen, Kath, Kathy... and no doubt, many other names that may have been used at times.

For me, my first encounter with Kath was at my induction as Vicar of Pascoe Vale/Oak Park in 2003. I was introduced to Kath by one of the governors of Edith Bendall Lodge, together with her equivalent at the Dorothy Impey Home, Heather Gray, also in Pascoe Vale. Even though the two of them rarely spoke or did things together, between them, they were to enthuse in me a passion for ministry to the elderly, and to promote a new way, for me at least, to approach ministry to those in the next stage of their lives.

From working with both of them: one from an entrepreneurial viewpoint as the new premises were built, and with Kath as CEO and Director of Nursing, I was to learn much from them regarding what is required concerning duty, care, and responsibility.

Being a musician one of the first things that I set out to do at Edith Bendall was to make sure that space, where the organ was housed, was accessible, and indeed, used. After letting it loose with many of the old favourite hymns of the residents – both in the independent living and in the central hostel, Kath was invariably smiling when I left. She would go the door to her office ajar, so she could hear the music being played.

In the many conversations that followed, we had excellent and earnest discussions about issues with residents, boards, staff, her health, her friends, and her ambitions. There is no doubt she liked to run a tight ship, but there was usually time for a chat, especially if she was having a lunch break, which somehow always seemed to consist of chips!

There is much more than I could say, and perhaps shouldn't say, but rather to say, my view on Aged Care, ministry and spirituality was indeed shaped from my time in the Pascoe Vale parish.

As part of the time there, the Parish employed a pastoral worker to help develop a program that we called "the transitional generation". Headed up by the Rev'd Rachel McDougall, it explored that phase in life between entering into retirement and the transition into care. For not only the person coming into this stage, but there are also issues around the family and their own sense of change. For some, the need to receive regular nursing care that is beyond that which is manageable at home creates many tensions, and many of the ravages of time to catch up, requiring specialised care.

Behind the theology and philosophy that developed for me was a fundamental understanding of the two readings I selected for today. The first, from the latter canon of Hebrew scriptures, remind us that for everything in creation, there is a time and season. It is not all being at the peak: we have to grow, we learn to live, and then we begin the transition to death and what lies beyond.

For Kath, confident of her own mortality and faith, Kath was a person of strength.

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Behind her philosophy was the firm understanding from the commandments given to Moses that “you must honour your mother and father.” This was tempered by the knowledge that in aged care, there are times when we are all challenged. When a decision is made for a transition into care or supervised living, then that precept of honour of the parents or elderly is vicariously exercised to the best of the ability of the facility, and the biggest asset of all, the staff.

Kath was a champion of nurses’ rights and conditions. She was very much behind the campaign of the late 80s and 90s to ensure that the status and wages of nurses were to be fairly recognised and made. Even though I was living in a college at the time which was to produce some very prominent hard line ‘right’ commentators of today, I had no hesitation to sport a sticker on my car that declared “Dedication does not pay a nurse’s rent.” I had similar experiences in Tasmania as a teacher where the expectations were that duty was required in some cases up to 15 hours a day, often repaid only with criticism.

The interaction of Jesus with the leaders of the time is about the care of the elderly. Looking back now some 2000 years, it would seem that as a civilised community, we’re slow learners. Kath and I talked about this passage on occasions. It also appears in the gospel of Mark and Luke, so we’re reasonably sure of its authenticity. There was a loophole in the reading of the law. You could hand over your parents care to the Temple for the payment of a sum of money, and then leave them to it. It was called Corban, an offering. What you give to God remains God’s. You hand over the elderly, fragile, and in need, and then it is not your concern.

It’s a bit like the old joke about what happens to the collection money on Sunday. You throw it up in the air: what God catches is God’s, and what falls to earth belongs to the Parish!

Jesus’ criticism of the Pharisees stung hard. The care of those in need was at the heart of the criticism, and this was an issue that challenged the holistic delivery of care. For a nurse who began her career out of the Western Suburbs, her journey saw her graduate in 1961 from St Vincent’s Hospital, and then in 1965, having completed midwifery, from the Royal North Shore Hospital. Like many in the mid-60s, thanks to the advent of modern transport, she travelled and saw not only the world but also, the treasures of each country – the people.

She lived in Toronto for 3 years, and then London, nursing as she travelled. Her studies continued with a Diploma of Nursing Administration in 1975 and a Bachelor of Applied Science Advanced Nursing in 1986. This led to many roles in nursing, administration and aged care before she was invited to be CEO and DON at Edith Bendall.

We all know that Kath had opinions and wasn’t adverse on sharing them. I have no doubt that the criticism that Jesus gave the Pharisees may well have been expressed more indelicately and tempered with some good Aussie Western suburban earthiness: “it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but it is what comes out of the mouth that defiles.” I’ll leave it to you to decide what you Kath would say what some people are talking!

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This led for some to find her abrupt and sharp. Knowing Kath, she would say it would not matter what you think, it is what she is thinking that has to be. It would put some offside, but when pressed on her call, it would come down to an intuitive understanding that to get the best with what you have, sometimes there has to be tough love. It would seem to me that Jesus understood that. The next line in the gospel has the disciples informing Jesus that the Pharisees took offence. Jesus continued with what could be described as a blueprint for the Werribee Water Works.

A few weeks ago, Kath, with her friend Gae, stood upon this property and lifted their eyes to what I consider my backyard. There, across the lush paddocks, our eyes are drawn to the heavens. Mount Macedon is to the left; Mount Toowong to the right; and just over the middle is the Camel's Hump and Mt Mount Diogenes, much loved and famously known as Hanging Rock. It took her breath away. There was a quiet "Oh God!" as she let her eyes feast it in. We spoke about Psalm 121: I lift my eyes to the hills, from where is my help? My help is from the Lord who made heaven and earth. Another sigh was followed by "Oh yes, yes. It does." Only then was it partly decided that you also were to be invited into that vision, but only on one proviso. Did the new church have an organ of good sound in which she could be farewelled in style?

We entered into the Church, and the David Gome Memorial Organ was immediately spotted. Dr David Gome's widow, Dianne, is our organist today. I played the organ for Kath – there is a photo on the back of the order. She was delighted. We then explored the artwork in the Church before once again lifting our eyes into the beautiful splendour that is the Leonard French Resurrection window. I explained the symbolism from fire to new birth, to honour those who were killed in the Ash Wednesday fires, and the new life around the sign that Constantine saw in the sky, the means by which Christ conquered death, radiating out in a Celtic Columbian cross. It was named after St Columba, the Irish mad bishop who was exiled onto the Scottish isle of Iona. St Columba was the patron of the school in Essendon which Kath had attended as a girl.

Yes, this was the place where we were to invite you today to honour Kath in totality, and to encourage you to drink in with your eyes and ears the sound of the mountains as you indeed lift your eyes to the hills.

It was on a mountain that the commandments were given to Moses. In there was the command to honour your parents and elderly. For Kath, caring for her own parents, and the parents of so many others, she was up to the challenge. Yes, she ruffled a few feathers along the way as she let the times and seasons take their toll – then again, so did Jesus!

I am grateful for having known, listened, reflected, dined, argued, laughed and cried with Kath. I am glad she lifted her countenance to her loving God and did what she could to care for others, without fear or favour. We let the seasons now come to a close as we know she is at rest.

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St Peter better is sure of how heaven is run lest he finds, over a healthy serving of chips, or maybe, just maybe, as Gae and I witnessed (contrary to her diet) the most massive serving of Devonshire Tea possible right up there on the mountain!

Over the morning tea, also prepared according to Kath's instructions, I invite you to enter into a healthy discourse of Kath's life. She would have loved to have had the time to ask you to her wake so she could hear what you were saying...then again, maybe it is best left to us over a cuppa in the Narthex. And as you go, do walk out onto the labyrinth or balcony, and let your senses be transported towards the place of inspiration knowing that this, for Kath, illustrated all that was good about life itself.

Kath: rest in peace. This season is over, now let yourself be in that place of inspiration that we can only be inspired to know: the very presence of our creator and loving God.