

Bread broken, eyes open; Christa is here

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 3 April 2016

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Dr Margaret Mayman

Easter 2C

Acts 2: 14 a, 36-41; Luke 24: 13-35; Contemporary Reading

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Today I decided that the contemporary reading would be part of the sermon... I came across a quotation by Jürgen Moltmann during the week that encapsulates the challenging meaning of resurrection.

Resurrection is not a consoling opium, soothing us with the promise of a better world in the hereafter. It is the energy for the rebirth of this life. The hope doesn't point to another world. It is focused on the redemption of this one. In the Spirit, resurrection is not merely expected. It is already experienced. Resurrection happens every day. In love we experience many deaths and many resurrections. We experience resurrection through the rebirth to living hope. We experience resurrection through the love which already brings us to life here and now; and we experience resurrection through liberation: 'Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty – there is freedom.' (II Cor. 3:17) (Jürgen Moltmann, *Jesus Christ for Today's World*, p. 81.)

Today I want to grasp that freedom in reimagining Christ... particularly in the idea of the Risen Christa and in doing so to name the liberation and the full humanity of women as part of the reality of resurrection.

I have spoken before about the idea and representations of Christa, particularly the representation of a crucified woman by 20th century sculptor Edwina Sandys. There have been other representations of a crucified woman. But Christa crucified, cannot be the end of the story. Where do we find the risen Christa? Is it possible to claim that while Jesus died as a Palestinian, Jewish man, Christ rises to be God with us in many different forms – including the Christa.

Is it possible, that when the Risen One was made known to two disciples encountered on the Emmaus road, when they broke bread together, that they encountered not a male Christ, but God made known to them in female form. And would they both have laughed with surprise and recognition. And would not their gendered, unjust world be changed forever?

Feminist theology is part of a larger project of liberation theology which points to the many ways in which religion is and can be oppressive, and yet, at the same time, offers hope of renewing religion at its roots by the process of bringing back into the mainstream that which has been previously denied. Denied, marginalized and repressed. It enables the healing of the splits that have fractured the Christian tradition and the body of Christ. The goal of feminist liberation theology is not simply to critique but to re-enliven.

Feminist theologians have been talking about Jesus and about Christian claims about Christ for decades now. There is a vast and lively literature which looks at what Jesus said about and to women, and how he interacted with women. Feminist theologians have asked the question: “*can a male saviour save women?*” And wondered if Jesus subverts or reinforces male dominance. Feminists have been leading critics of traditional atonement theory which said that God required Jesus’ death as a sacrifice to pay for human sin. The reign of God has been explored by feminists - in terms of its vision of gender equality (and all the intersections of gender with race, class, sexual orientation, etc.) and they have paid attention to Jesus’ practice of sharing an open table with people who were regarded as marginalised and outcast by religious and political elites.

Last Sunday we sang Bill Wallace’s song “We are an Easter People.” The refrain of that song says: “*Christ is risen, Christ is risen, Christ is risen in our lives.*” This song represents the theological claim that the Christian community continues Christ’s identity and presence in the world today. And since this community includes women, it is perfectly legitimate, even necessary, for women to represent Christ. Rosemary Reuther says; “*We can encounter Christ in the form of our sister. Christ, the liberated humanity, is not confined to a static perfection of one person two thousand years ago.*”

(Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Sexism and God-Talk* (London: SCM Press, 1983), p. 138.)

Carter Heyward also makes a distinction between the Jesus of history – ‘*a Jewish male with a particular relationship to [the Sacred].*’ *Christ, she says, may be for Christians the saving implications of the Jesus story or the characterization of justice-making with compassion, courage, and integrity.* (Carter Heyward, *Speaking of Christ: A Lesbian Feminist Voice* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1989), p. 21.)

This is a much less personal understanding of the Risen Christ than the idea of Jesus living again, and yet nevertheless a legitimate theological interpretation. St Paul’s notion of the Church as the ‘body of Christ’ suggests that the risen Christ is no longer to be identified with the historical Jesus but is to be encountered in the company of those who are baptized in his name.

It is as orthodox as St Teresa of Avila claiming in words we still speak today: “*Christ has no body now on earth but yours, no hands, no feet on earth but yours. Yours are the eyes through which Christ looks with compassion on the world.*”

Rita Nakashima Brock argues that feminist Christology must not be centred in the historic figure of Jesus, however much it may draw on the inspiration and teachings of Jesus, because that is to make of one individual, and a male at that, an heroic saviour figure to whom women look for meaning and guidance. She claims it leads to an unhealthy idolization of Jesus that disempowers women and prevents us from claiming our own spiritual authority.

She speaks of Christa not as a female risen one, but as Christa/Community. The Risen One who lives now in the community that bears the dangerous memory of Jesus - but of Jesus’ female and male friends.

There is a great deal more that could be said about the crucified and risen Christa, but for now I simply want to leave you with the idea as an invitation, as an offering on your Easter journey. It may resonate with you, it may not. But I hope that in the expansiveness of reimagining Christa, it will move us beyond the traditional piety that sees the risen Christ only as a perfected Jesus to whom we relate as personal friend.

I say this not to undermine the comfort that this image may bring but to unleash the power of the risen One that will only be liberated when we participate in its hope and its power to change ourselves and our world.

Easter is not simply one day in the Christian calendar but a period of fifty days during which the Church celebrates the risen life into which Christ has entered and into which all who walk with Christa are invited to participate. It is a season in which we are invited to live into the reality of our own risen life, taking the time and space we need to grasp it and internalize it.

So one week into the fifty days, I invite you now to reflect on four paintings by Filipino artist Emmanuel Garibay depicting the moment of recognition in the Emmaus journey. When the bread is broken, the disciples encounter the risen one as the female Christ. In Garibay's paintings, they are drinking beer, eating food and recognising the Risen One as a Filipina woman.

They roar with laughter, slapping their foreheads in amazement, and in recognition of their previous blindness. Surely she was there all along, and they remembered that their hearts were strangely warmed.

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It happens for everyone, through everyone, male and female and trans, black and white, rich and poor, queer and straight. And Christ/Christa is risen in us all...

And so we laugh out loud, at the outrageous joy of it...Christa is risen!