

## Hi note one, twenty fifteen: *twenty plenty* actually: 3 stories

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We have just had a weekend retreat with the girls who are beneficiaries of Di's love, care and attention; intense attention in fact and the Zewenfontein Education Fund. It was my first youth retreat in years and I thought I had outgrown young people and that the programme I used to do with them was outdated. Well I haven't and the programme is as relevant as ever. In fact as I reflect on All Saints the programme seems relevant for us too. I called it the Three Story Mountain with apologies to Thomas Merton who wrote a book called the Seven Storey Mountain. The three stories we tell on the retreat are the Old Story, the Real Story and finally the New Story. The Old story is the story we tell to justify our bad behaviour in the present – for example "I hate church because I went to a church boarding school and it was such a bad experience that I will never set foot in a church." A kind of 'that's my story and I'm sticking to it'. It may explain your behaviour now but it does little to transform you from one degree of glory to the next and will never get you to the place where you can grow into the fullness and stature of Christ and that is really what Christianity is all about. Becoming Christ is not an optional extra for one or two. It is the only reason we exist. The fuel for this is our love for each other (totally unreliable source) and the Eucharist (thank God) that enables us to achieve this lofty ideal. This is the real story: that Jesus became one of us so that we may become one with Him and ultimately indistinguishable from him. Jesus prays in the High Priestly prayer of John's Gospel that they (we) may be one even as Jesus and the Father are one. We are exposed to God's interior life – God within God's self – so that we may emulate; copy that inner life. Finally then the New story which is at once deeply personal and

obviously communal because God is community; communion really. Here having honestly reflected on our old stories as well as the real story we now bring them together under the light of Christ so that they may be redeemed and become the basis for a new full, contributing life that is blessing in all its loving fullness and where there is no place for dishonest and painful destruction of humanity and all creation and telling of stories that justify bad behaviour.

Lent is not far off and soon we will elect a new council. And the new story tells me that God will raise up a council that will be appropriate to our times and needs. A council that will be prophetic – laden with those who, like the Wise Men who brought gifts and not skills (though they obviously had plenty of that), will bring their gifts and not their skills. Remember Peter Block's advice: the gifts that are assembled in a community at any one time, determine the agenda. It is not the skills that determine the action plan. The skills may be employed in achieving the objectives on the agenda but the gifts write the agenda. And when you bring your gift you remain humble and reliant upon God and you have to go back to God continuously to be replenished. The church needs this approach so that we may be Messiah; Messianic and prophetic. A Body of people providing healing balm to the world not a collection of Edward Scissor Hands flailing destructively and causing mayhem.

The new story tells me that we will tell a different story to the one which now goes around the parish and this new story (the Good News Story) will begin with those who are elected to serve on council. We will no longer entertain the old story because for one, it is not true and certainly not life giving

and transformational. If you can't be part of that movement please don't accept nomination for council. The new story council will love one another having made that choice (to Love) and will seek to be one. The Springfaire committee lived that out so wonderfully as they, apart from arranging a fete, also cared for each other deeply. I know that there are gatherers of the old story. You must stop now and begin to listen to God so that you may become God to the world. That is your high calling.

The New story also has us confronting the fact that as we receive the body of Christ we become the Body of Christ. We become deeply connected, deeply interrelated profoundly family! That means we remain loyal to our imperfect family who are mere sinners striving to be saints but are mostly way off the mark. Our most powerful witness is precisely our holding onto each other despite our imperfections. Judgement was a word I heard over and over again the weekend and someone quoted from a magazine the following: "people who judge have no time to love." There has been too much of that and too many whose response was to leave the family. That is not Kingdom behaviour. How are we to become imitators of Christ if you have turned your back on us and left us bereft of your gift. You will only find healing here at All Saints; your family who love you though imperfectly and sinfully but our destinies are linked and so right now no one is growing into Christ's stature.

I have never believed that the church was a marshmallow or a vanilla cloud or an eiderdown. The choice to follow Jesus has always been a journey into the fire to save the world. Why else would we be given the option to receive the Holy Spirit which is fire?! Why indeed? The church is a place of combustion that makes possible transformation. Each one of us is to save

another and be saved by yet another. Each one of us is at once sinner and redeemer – now kneeling humbly in confession seeking reconciliation, now standing humbly before one who kneels listening lovingly to a confession and generously dispensing redemption and effecting reconciliation!

This is the new story – realising in love the truth about the imperfect nature of community. Most significantly the New Story communion prays together. This was the message I brought back from my Sabbatical. I know it was the message because no sooner had it started and things began to come undone. How sad. It's been a bit like cutting off all communication with our parents. That can't be right

Finally we are presented with two options as a church:

- ✦ Tick the boxes Christianity or
- ✦ To choose to be a church that transforms lives and reconciles humanity to God, self and the world – whatever that means.

I choose the latter simply because here I stand I can do no other. Please pray for me because the loneliness is unbearable at times. Mostly I feel like an out of touch fool because no one seems to hear what I hear. But we are family and families hold together even the strange eccentric family member who won't just let things go. Familiar?

The Lent course starts this week. I urge you all to participate. We really must know that we need each other in the process of our formation. Please come whether you have the book or not. Just familiarise yourself with the Ten Commandments 😊 Look forward to seeing many of you there. If we reach 30 attendees I promise to bake biscuits for week two. Cross my heart and hope to die!

I love you all always

**Miki**