

## TO WHOM SHALL WE GO?

John 13:60-70

The Corrymeela Community

12 January 2020

75 years ago, next month, the founder of Corrymeela, Ray Davey, looked out his window and saw the world on fire. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of February 1945 the Allies spent the night dropping incendiary bombs onto the city of Dresden, within sight of where Ray was confined. He was fifteen miles away and not in immediate danger, but the event traumatised him: the deafening sound of the squadrons; the piercing squeal of the munitions meant to terrorise on their way down; the sirens of a city packed with helpless refugees. The pitch black darkness disrupted by an unnatural glow. Ray could see how high into the sky the flames and the smoke rose. And what cut him to his core was that it was the ‘good guys’ who were doing this for no good reason.

A prisoner of war, Ray saw how humanity had become imprisoned *by* war – and violence and hatred and revenge; how we become guilty even in our righteous pursuits; that in the defeat of evil we become entangled in evil ourselves. For Ray, the escape from this madness, the way to break the cycle of violence, the only hope for the world was to live like Christ as best one could: to *love* your enemies, to treat everyone with equity, to approach the stranger not with fear or suspicion but with the expectation that you would meet a child of God. That faith gave Ray a route of escape. It allowed him to find a response to the madness he witnessed. And it became the spirit at work in the movement of Corrymeela.

Make no mistake: like the early disciples described in our scripture passage for today, Ray was a mixture of both belief and doubt. He contained within himself not only the trust that Jesus was the Holy One of God but also the capacity to betray that faith and fail by his own standards. Yet I am also sure that Ray – when he doubted and when he looked at a world persisting in its ways of violence and hypocrisy – returned again and again to an inescapable conclusion: that it must be a path of kindness and community and selflessness and love that we should follow. Where else can we go? These are the words of eternal life: ‘love one another as I have loved you.’

As we look out on the world today in 2020, parts of it are literally on fire. The scale of the disaster in Australia serves as a warning to us – but it is already an inescapable reality for people who are victims of the climate change that puts our most vulnerable at risk and makes refugees of tens of millions. The madness of our consumerism, this sin as old as Adam of wanting more and more for ourselves without consequence, has caught up with us. And the tendency in humanity to view the other with suspicion, to split the world into us and them, good and bad, has allowed a tribalistic populism to spread like fire through the democracies of the West, turning the ‘good guys’ into warring monsters once again. We rejoice in the prospect of a shared government resuming at Stormont – but we note wider trends in our political landscape. That just when we need to rally together to address the problems of this world, we are retreating into pockets of sameness into prisons of likeness where we maximise the most for ourselves.

And so the question that Peter asks, ‘to whom can we go?’ It seems particularly apt for today. Are we as Corrymeela, are we as people wanting to respond to the madness of this world and the madness within ourselves, are we willing to turn again to the teachings of a rabbi who some regard as divine? Do we believe that the teachings of Jesus and his commandment to love one another provide a path of escape to follow? That these words are words of eternal life?

A daughter and I were driving down to Belfast the other day (well, I was driving; she was just sitting there) – and without warning she turned to me and asked: ‘Are there members of Corrymeela who aren’t Christian?’ And I swallowed and said, ‘Um, well, yes, technically, I think... well, let me say that there are *some* members who wouldn’t identify as Christian themselves or who aren’t as comfortable with that term but who still are a part of Corrymeela.’ It was hard to answer. But then I found myself quite quickly and quite honestly and quite confidently thinking, ‘No. There aren’t any members who aren’t Christian. At least none that I’ve met. They *are* Christian in my mind. They’re certainly as Christian as *I’ve* ever managed to be. They love others as Jesus would call us to love. In fact, many of the ones who have the hardest time with the title Christian act more often in the way I would want Christian to act. The fact is you one can find a ‘Christ-like’ witness as easily in the conversations between atheists in the Corrymeela kitchen as in the decisions of the Corrymeela Council. (And isn’t it nice that we have a Council that lets me say such things?) Those of us who more easily identify as Christian are probably just more comfortable with being hypocritical.’

My daughter looked at me as though this was a pretty weird answer. But I’m sticking to it. Because if being Christian is something that’s either yes or no, you are or you are not – then I’m not sure that even the Twelve original disciples or Ray would have made the cut. But if in our context being Christian can mean recognising that loving other people as we have been loved is a divine response to the madness of human life – then to be a part of Corrymeela is to be part of a Christian community. The commitment members make today is not to declare ourselves one thing or another or to mark ourselves as either this or that, in or out. It is to *escape* all that nonsense. It is to respond to the madness of this world and the tendency to carve the world into us and them, this or that, in or out with the hope of a better way. To confront the madness of hatred and violence and selfishness and injustice with love and determination.

The world is on fire. And we have come here again to the question of how to escape the prison we have created. Where can we go – but to the one who provides words of eternal life? Love one another as I have loved you.

Amen.