

PAPER CHURCH

On the Shoulders of Giants – Dorothy Day

Sunday 14 June 2020

Some Tips

Our hope is that this is a resource that will help us all to engage meaningfully with God's word for us and invite an open and experimental sense of worship today. Use it in a way that feels comfortable and helpful to you. Here are a couple of suggestions that might help the process.

Get prepared for worship

Have your Bible close by, perhaps set up some favourite music to listen to, find some food and drink to have during communion. It doesn't have to be bread and grape juice; it could be whatever is available (tea and a biscuit) to use in this symbolic time.

Get into a 'sacred' space

When we are not physically in a dedicated worship space (like a church building), it is important to mentally and spiritually shift into a sense of worship.

Be intentional. Sit somewhere where you feel receptive and responsive to God (e.g. a cosy chair or outside in the garden). Have some visual representation of God (perhaps a small cross, your Bible, a symbol or image). Start with a few moments of silence and deep breathing.

Consider your environment

Consider your environment and what will work for you. If you have others in your house (house-mates/family), consider sharing this time with them, each reading or participating as appropriate. You might simply reflect individually, in your own time and space. Afterwards, you might connect with others through technology to share your reflections, or an encouragement, with them.

Song: Christ is Enough

Christ is my reward and all of my devotion
Now there's nothing in this world
That could ever satisfy
Through every trial my soul will sing
No turning back I've been set free

Christ is enough for me
Christ is enough for me
Everything I need is in You
Everything I need

Christ my all in all the joy of my salvation
And this hope will never fail
Heaven is our home
Through every storm my soul will sing
Jesus is here to God be the glory

I have decided to follow Jesus
No turning back no turning back

The cross before me the world behind me
No turning back no turning back

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Message

Kaye Reid

This series 'Standing on the Shoulders of Giants' has started me thinking about the many different biographies I have read over the years and how someone's story is so powerful in broadening our horizon, our understanding of other people, our empathy and compassion. How we personalise it as we read and wonder what we would have done, whether we would have coped. It inspires and challenges us. We look at our own lives and see aspects that are affirmed and aspects that are challenged by the stories of others.

I looked in my bookcases for a few biographies and found lots, and thought about how they had influenced and shaped me. Some of them were from when I was younger; I felt a bit nostalgic about these ones: Corrie ten Boom, *The Diary of Ann Frank*, *A Fortunate Life*. And as a young adult, *Long Walk to Freedom* by Nelson Mandela, and then as I studied theology the biographies of Bonhoeffer, CS Lewis, William Wilberforce. Then a wider range of voices – indigenous, female, from developing countries, and a broader range of issues and perspectives - refugee, disability, sport, gender, sexual orientation, religion. The ones about breaking records and smashing ideas of what is possible, and they all intersect with what has happened or is happening in our world. They are all about ordinary people who made a difference by believing in something, speaking out or standing against something that was oppressive or unfair, for exceptional skill and persistence,

demonstrating determination, persistence, and nearly always a long, long pursuit with a singular focus.

It was great last week listening to Penny sharing with us about Bonhoeffer. Such a challenge to us, to take on his story in his incredibly challenging time, and to allow it to ask something of us in our own context and time. If you haven't already, then do watch and listen, and if you have already, then share it with someone else who might be interested. Stories are so accessible. As we were chatting about people's stories in our breakout room on Zoom communion and foyer last week, they are indisputable. It is someone's experience.

In contrast to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, someone who I have already studied over a long period of time and read a lot of his writings and been inspired and challenged by, I have been fascinated to be learning about someone who until recently I knew very little about; Dorothy Day. I had a sense that she was probably American, in the 1900s and the phrase Catholic Worker came to mind. But I didn't know why or what that meant. The benefit of exploring a social giant like Dorothy Day who lived from 1897 to 1980 is that we have photo and video footage and people who are alive today who were shaped and influenced directly by her. Check out this three-minute video to introduce us to Dorothy Day. It's a trailer for a one-hour film called *Revolution of the Heart: The Dorothy Day Story* which you might want to google to watch at a later time.

Revolution of the Heart: The Dorothy Day Story

A Film by Martin Doblmeier

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mh8mt3gvDbc>

In many ways, Dorothy Day was a typical grandmother. Martha Hennessey, Granddaughter: "I see my grandmother as someone who was very ordinary but also very extraordinary. I mean I understood that she was different."

Different because Dorothy Day was so often on the front lines, protesting war and nuclear build up, creating houses of hospitality for the hungry and homeless, and earning her place on the FBI watch list as a dangerous American. Timothy Kaine, United States Senator: "Yeah, Dorothy Day is a big troublemaker."

As a young journalist, Dorothy Day campaigned for those in need. Paul Elie, Georgetown University: "Her work keeps putting her front and centre of the social movements of her time." She wrote about worker's rights, child labour. She was attracted to communism, believing it was a way to improve people's lives. All part of a chapter in her own life that would leave its scars. But with the birth of her daughter, Dorothy Day turned from communism and converted to the Catholic faith. There she discovered a path that for nearly half a century led her to become one of the greatest champions for the poor America has ever known.

Jim Wallis, *Sojourners*: "She thought if communism is radical, why shouldn't Christianity be radical. This is radical."

Kate Hennessey, Granddaughter: "My Grandmother always said that she never meant to start houses of hospitality, she never meant to open up soup lines, but what happens when you start writing about these things, people show up at the door."

Robert Ellsberg, Biographer: "She wanted though, people to exercise their own sense of responsibility. You see something that needs to be done, you do it."

But accepting the biblical challenge to be peacemakers also compelled her to become a pacifist without compromise. To use her Catholic work or movement and the newspaper she founded to resist America's intervention in any war. Many believed her behaviour was unAmerican.

Martha Hennessey, Granddaughter: "She did describe herself as an anarchist." Cornel West, Public Theologian: "There's an anarchist dimension to her Christian witness."

Martin Sheen, Actor & Activist: "Some of the most profound and most rewarding demonstrations culminated in arrests were with the Catholic worker community."

Joan Chittister, Author & Activist: "I think of Dorothy Day as a firecracker that never goes out."

Now this grandmother and anarchist may well be declared a saint. Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York: "We'd love to see Dorothy made a saint."

Mark Massa, Boston College: "For both American middle-class people and for Catholics, they recognised that something extraordinary was going on. They weren't quite sure what to do with it."

Simone Campbell, Executive Director, *Network*: "She annoyed people because she challenged them."

Jim Wallis, *Sojourner*: "She would have said 'Don't call me a saint. I don't want to be written off that easily'."

Dorothy Day: "Well I think if you take the Lord's words you'll find they're pretty rigorous. The Sermon on the Mount may be read with great enjoyment but when it comes to practising it, it really is an examination of conscience just to see how far we go."

Bible Reading: Matthew 5:7-9 (NIV)

Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.

Message Continued

At the end of the video Dorothy Day had these confronting words to say regarding the sermon on the mount.

"If you take the Lord's words you'll find that they are pretty rigorous. The Sermon on the Mount may be read with great enjoyment but when it comes to practising it, it really is an examination of conscience, just to see how far we go."

And that really captures for us the essence of the life of Dorothy Day. To do just that and to take it seriously. To work out what being merciful, pure in heart, and a peacemaker looked like in her time. And this was not easy. She lived through The Great Depression, and US participation in WWI and WW2, the Korean War and the War in Vietnam; challenging times of suffering and social change. At the time of WWII she wrote in the *Catholic Worker*, "We stand at the present time with

the Communists, who are also opposing war.... The Sermon on the Mount is our Christian manifesto." ("Our Stand," *Catholic Worker*, June 1940)

This position did not align her with the popular view at the time, including the predominant Catholic viewpoint based on a Just War theory. But it is how she understood the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.

As I got to know more about Dorothy Day I noticed the strong parallels between these three verses and how she lived her life.

Blessed are the merciful

She spent over 50 years involved in the hands-on work of extending Mercy and Compassion. With Peter Maurin, she started and ran the Catholic Worker movement including a newspaper about workers' right and injustices of which she was the editor until her death. Dorothy Day initially just wrote about opening homes of hospitality but was confronted one day by a woman who came to her door asking for help and she realised she couldn't just write about these homes of hospitality but that she needed to create them. These were grass roots expressions of love and community, with soup and coffee, in solidarity with the poor. She challenged others to do the same. By the time of her death there were over 25 such homes. There are now, 40 years later, over 200 around the world. She joined with movements for workers' rights, farm strikes, anti-war protests and as an activist was arrested numerous times. She refused to pay federal taxes because of their funding of war/nuclear armament but paid local taxes in support of the needs of the community. Dorothy Day's mercy and compassion flowed from her wholeness which was nurtured through spiritual practices. She wanted this wholeness and abundance for everyone.

Take some moments to pause and reflect:

HOW DO WE GIVE AWAY WHO WE ARE AND WHAT WE HAVE SKILLS, EXPERIENCE OR PASSION IN, FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS?

Blessed are the pure in heart

She cultivated and practiced an Intimacy with God. There was a sacramental aspect to her spirituality and life. Intentionally, regularly and actively - daily spiritual practices of prayer, scripture reading, attending Mass. Reading, writing and learning - as well as scripture and social writings, she read the Popes, and was very interested in the saints. Pope Francis when he spoke at the US Congress included Dorothy Day among four exemplary Americans who built a better future.

A "permanent revolution" had been initiated by Dorothy's leadership, grounded in the Sermon on the Mount for which she had "prayed, spoken, written, fasted, protested, suffered humiliation and gone to prison"
(Eileen Egan, Dorothy Day and the Permanent Revolution).

As she stood on the shoulders of giants, learning from others and building a better future, so now do others benefit and learn from her.

Her sacramental spirituality was also expressed through nature and her experiences of being loved and loving others. This was the basis of her coming to faith, not as many of us do from a mindset of guilt, shame or fear but from what she called natural joy or happiness, which was shown to her in

nature by her then husband who was a biologist, and through his love for her, and through her experience of having their child and her joy and love for her daughter Tamar. While finding God's love in nature and human relationships, she didn't disparage her pre-conversion life but understood how it informed her adulthood with experience and understanding.

Dorothy Day knew scripture well (as do most of these giants of the faith). It was part of her daily meditation, and scripture verses and images spontaneously wove themselves into her writings. The example and teachings of Christ were at the heart of her spirituality.

While she herself had read many of the saints, she would have said "Don't call me a saint. I don't want to be written off that easily." So, while the Catholic church undertakes the process towards sainthood for this radical anarchist, Dorothy Day reminds us that we need to resist seeing her, or anyone else, as extraordinary and letting ourselves off the hook.

Take some moments to pause and reflect:

HOW DO WE PURSUE A PURITY OF HEART?

FROM WHAT SPIRITUAL PRACTICES ARE WE CREATING A GOOD FOUNDATION?

Blessed are the Peacemakers

Dorothy Day was an Active Pacifist. She passionately and unpopularity pursued an absolute non-violence. Dorothy opposed all wars and the use of force and violence to solve human problems. She practiced and promoted human dignity with the spiritual tools of prayer, fasting, generosity, and civil disobedience. Like Jesus, she took her message to the people in the streets. By her public words and work, Dorothy sought to imitate Christ's witness against injustice, even when such witness seemed foolish to others. She was critical of the powers and structures of injustice and was ridiculed and opposed for her witness.

Take some moments to pause and reflect:

WHAT IS GOD CALLING US TO DO?

HOW DO WE NOT JUST SEEK PEACE, BUT BE PEOPLE WHO WANT TO MAKE PEACE?

Dorothy Day's life demonstrates faithful, courageous and prophetic discipleship. A long persistence in the repetitive and messy work of responding to basic human needs, providing food and personal warmth, ensuring that people felt loved and accepted. Dorothy Day understood and was involved in responding to the immediate needs of people but also in taking an active and public stance in addressing the systemic issues.

She used the skills that she had in journalism to respond to the unjust circumstances of her time – poverty, workers' rights, war, and acted upon these throughout her life. She wanted people to take personal responsibility for helping others and expected that to include personal sacrifice and identification with others.

For Dorothy Day, her faith and life intersected in taking the Sermon on the Mount seriously and applying it to her life. This became the story of her life and the story that inspires and challenges us today.

What story are you writing, and about to write?

There are so many possible areas for us to learn from the life of Dorothy Day. What I have been drawn to are the foundations that underly her life's work. She allowed issues of poverty and peacemaking to be personal for her, as she took personal responsibility to act on these things through her words and her actions. What I have found significant is that she did this from a purity of heart; an intimacy with God. This was her foundation, a sacramental, intentional, and regular engagement with spiritual practices that birthed an intimacy and an honesty with God, taking the scriptures seriously and living accordingly.

For us, the last two to three month have been a time of disruption and isolation due to COVID-19. It has coincided up until now with the season of Autumn. It has paralleled the shedding of leaves. A shedding of many things. A time of slowing down the pace of some aspects of life and making our focus a bit smaller in some ways; family, neighbours, staying at home.

Now over the last couple of weeks there has been a first easing of restrictions, schools have resumed with face-to-face learning, some cafes and restaurants have re-opened, we can travel a bit further afield, and there are probably a few more restrictions about to be eased some more.

But at the same time, winter has settled in. I wonder whether we too need to settle in over winter - to bed down some of the things we have begun to learn during restrictions. To lay down some deeper foundations before responding to the pressure and assumptions to resume life as it was. Disruption can be helpful, although painful. The disruptions that we have experienced have forced, without the usual routines and triggers like Sunday church, more personal responsibility for our spiritual formation, our experiences of community for ourselves and others, and for being active in mission in local and creative ways. It has also given us as communities a vision of what can be achieved for the common good, people caring for each other, an easing of the negative impact on the environment.

The story that we are writing can be one of putting down some deep foundations during this winter and preparing ourselves well to be ready for spring. Ready for a different narrative for us and for our community. Of new things. As a people who follow the challenging and hope-filled words of Jesus to be people of mercy, of peacemaking and of pure heart.

What is God calling us to do? Continue to do? Refresh? Step out into?

Take some moments to pause and reflect:

"THE GREATEST CHALLENGE OF THE DAY IS: HOW TO BRING ABOUT A REVOLUTION OF THE HEART, A REVOLUTION WHICH HAS TO START WITH EACH ONE OF US."

Communion

Prepared by Marg Goddard

Have some food and drink prepared for this time

Do this and remember...

Each week as we gather, we take a few minutes to share in a ritual meal. We eat and drink and remember events that took place over 2000 years ago, which are still relevant to us today. The original meal was itself a meal of remembering as the Jews set aside time each year to remember the Exodus, when God used Moses to rescue them from slavery in Egypt and to recall the giants of their past. Within that celebratory meal, Jesus took some of the bread and wine that was on the table and gave it new meaning.

Remembering is often linked to symbols. If we see a red poppy we think of Remembrance Day or Anzac Day. A pink coloured ribbon reminds us of breast cancer research. A green traffic light tells us we can go. We rely on symbols for so many things each day.

At the moment while we can't meet together in large groups, we can still remember as we have been doing by taking something to eat and drink as symbols of remembrance of the love of God to each one of us in sending Jesus, and whether we take communion as part of Zoom or Facebook together, or at another time, we are reminded that we are loved, and that we are a part of a community based on that great love of God for us, not just in Ringwood but in the wider world as well.

We are also reminded of what it's all about through scripture. In his letter to the Corinthian church, Paul said:

*I received my instructions from the Master himself and passed them on to you.
The Master, Jesus, on the night of his betrayal, took bread. Having given thanks,
he broke it and said,*

*This is my body, broken for you.
Do this to remember me.*

After supper, he did the same thing with the cup:

*This cup is my blood, my new covenant with you.
Each time you drink this cup, remember me. (1 Cor 11: 24-25, The Message)*

As you think on these familiar words, and eat and drink the food and drink you have prepared, remember the love that God has for you. And remember that we do this as a community, a community that extends beyond our imagination.

Benediction

Kaye Reid

I'm glad you have been able to worship today, perhaps in your own household, or with a few other people, able to enjoy the flexibility of worshipping from home in a way that works best for you while also missing being physically present together as a community.

I want to encourage you to explore further the life of Dorothy Day and other such giants of the faith, allowing yourself to be inspired by them, and allowing yourself to be challenged by them. And taking some intentional steps to deepen your own foundations during this season of winter.

While we are not able to see each other in person, it is helpful if you are able to complete an online connect card rngwd.com/connect to let us know that you have been worshipping today and mentioning anything that we can be praying about with you.

And if the time hasn't already passed, jump on to Zoom rngwd.com/communion or Facebook live rngwd.com/fby (no account required) at 11am on Sunday to share in communion together led by Marg Goddard this weekend and to have a chat with a few people. I had a great chat last weekend in the breakout room that I was in, hearing about who had been the giants of faith that had influenced and shaped each person in our chat.

As this time of worship concludes, go out into your lives to worship some more, give thanks to God with your whole heart, sing songs, walk outside, show mercy and compassion, make peace, seek justice, be pure of heart.

Go with God's blessings.

Amen.