

For Broadcast: 25th August 2019

JOY BEYOND SHATTERED DREAMS

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“Life wasn’t meant to be easy...” Do you remember that? The phrase bounced out of the halls of Canberra and bowled over a Prime Minister on the way. Poor old Malcolm Fraser was vilified in the popular press and the Opposition howled him down. “What a thing for a Prime Minister to say! How dare he! How out of touch with the electorate! How arrogant!” He copped the flak for years.

In reality, it wasn’t his phrase at all. He paraphrased a quote from the Irish play-write George Bernard Shaw, one of whose characters says, “Life is not meant to be easy my child; but take courage, it may be delightful.” That actually says something quite different. It’s a statement with some hope about it. Life isn’t just grinding pain, but difficulty suffused with joy. A week is a long time in politics, or anywhere. Things can take a dramatic turn in a heartbeat, for better or worse. But somewhere, somehow, all of us will face the reality that life isn’t easy.

When you’ve lost a loved one, been diagnosed with cancer, or you’re shooting your stock because of drought, it’s a moot point whether life was meant to be easy or not. It’s just hard. And for many of us, it’s hard for a long time. Now no one likes to hear about things being hard; all of us want life to be easy. We love “easy”: easy street, easy life, easy job, easy exams, easy meals. Easy peasy! But life isn’t like that, not even for the most privileged of us. Go behind the doors of any house in your town and you’ll find stories of disappointment, loss, heartache or pain. As well as joy.

I’m reading a book called Shattered Dreams. The author’s normal publisher turned him down, as did a few others. They said, “Larry, people don’t want to read things like that. They want to be happy. They won’t buy a book about shattered dreams”. Well, the publisher was wrong. Lots of people bought it, and lots of people have been blessed by it. Why? Because unlike easy street, it has the air of authenticity about it. It’s honest. It faces up to the fact that, sooner or later, one, or more—or even all—of our dreams may be shattered.

If that were all that the book said, I’d agree with the publisher. Stop press: “Your dreams will be shattered!”... not a good way to sell a book. It’s no more hopeful than saying “Life wasn’t meant to be easy”, full stop. No joy, just hardship. But that’s not where the book takes me. There’s a resurrection. Now, that word “resurrection” has a bit of character. It’s a loaded word. It might make you think of Easter, and certainly it would qualify as a Christian word.

But even if you don’t believe in the resurrection of Jesus, in a practical way we all believe in resurrections. Green fields after drought; a good crop after the locusts have come through; life that goes on after losing a loved one...they’re all resurrections of a sort. We count on them. They bring us joy; we couldn’t abide the thought of life without them. Life without a resurrection is life without hope.

We live in a wonderful universe. Everything good in this world bears the fingerprints of God who made it. The goodness of this world is a sign that points to him. We’re not supposed to look at the beauty of creation—or its mysteries—like a cow stares at a gate. We’re designed to see them as a signpost to something greater.

We live in a world whose Maker keeps speaking. Try as we might we can't close his voice off. He is there, and he isn't silent. God has designed the creation so that we'd see him, and perhaps grope for him and find him. So the renewal that comes after the bushfire; or the new growth that comes after the drought is saying something more than simply "it has rained". It's saying there's a resurrection, behind all these mini resurrections there's a big resurrection. The small resurrections are there so that we'd look even more deeply at what we're seeing.

God isn't a cruel trickster. He hasn't left us in a dark box with a jigsaw puzzle to assemble without a torch. He's not left us groping around in the darkness for life and hope. He's come to us in Jesus, to show us face to face what he's really like. When we find our dreams are shattered, the joy of resurrection draws us on. The mini resurrections along the way are signposts of hope. They're telling us that there's another, greater and eternal resurrection where all shattered dreams will be put behind us and true life will rise in our hearts.

When Jesus' disciples saw him on the other side of the cross they disbelieved for joy! It was too good to be true, so they thought. But really, it was too good not to be true. Jesus' resurrection brought them joy, because their shattered dreams no longer dominated their vision. Jesus' shattered body on the cross was just an invitation for a deeper faith in the same Jesus who loved them and gave himself up for them. On the other side of that cross Jesus stood before them with a new hope and a new future...for them, for us, for the whole creation.

You might think this is all a bit remote from where you are at the moment. Perhaps your world is different. Maybe you've never had your dreams shattered and don't expect to. Or perhaps you're in the middle of the devastation and you're wondering if there's any possibility of joy ever again. Jesus' resurrection says "Yes!" There is joy, because there's a lasting resurrection. Joy springs just like a green leaf in the drought stricken plain, and that leaf is the promise of a full harvest. A vista so desolate may yet be flooded with the joy of new life. You can't create it, but, like the disciples, you may be surprised by it!

Christ isn't in the business of shattering dreams out of vindictiveness, any more than he went to the cross to make the disciples seem foolish for not believing that he would die as a naked, taunted, spectacle of a man. He went to the cross to do one thing. To undo one world while creating another.

The nights of Good Friday and Easter Saturday were very dark indeed. The Light of the world had been extinguished, or so it seemed. But where darkness belongs to the night, joy comes in the morning. So when Jesus stood before them on Easter Sunday, joy returned with the rays of that Easter morn.

That same Jesus is with us and for us today. He lives still, never to die again. He is still our resurrected brother. He still speaks, and still draws us out of our shattered dreams to joy and hope beyond ourselves. He's here for you, too. He's here to draw you into the joy of his new life beyond shattered dreams.

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