

## **Pastor Lucy Baker's Welcoming Talk**

13 April 2008

Welcome and thank you for coming along to gauge the intention and energy of this Church. My team and I welcome you all. We hope that you make this a regular part of your life, and that, while you may arrive here, full of busy thoughts from the weekend with the prospect of Monday almost upon us, that you leave some of the old behind, and leave each service feeling strengthened, refreshed and more clearly remembering who you are really, underneath all the day to day hustle and bustle.

Before joining any religious or spiritual community, ask questions:

- Does it promote free inquiry?
- Does it promote universal justice and compassion?
- Does it promote healthy families and democratic communities?
- Does it promote compassion towards those with whom it disagrees?
- Does it promote the ending of fear, hatred, misogyny, homophobia, racism and separation?
- Does it promote health and well being of people and planet?
- Does it affirm and support your capacity to think and act for yourself?
- Does it place the power and ability of your spiritual connection back with you, rather than only through itself?

If you answer yes to these questions, it may be a Church worth joining.

Rabbi Rami Shapiro, author of *The Sacred Art of Lovingkindness* suggests that we start to view Religion as a bucket you drop into a well to draw up water. In this analogy, water refers to those transformative experiences that lift us out of our ego and into the Oneness of connection, leaving you more just, kind and humble. The bucket is one of the means by which you engage those experiences. The bucket is just a tool, it is the WATER, the experience, that matters. Unfortunately, often we forget this and worship our buckets rather than use them. The water in the bucket soon dries and we go in search of another bucket.

At first the new bucket, brimming with fresh water, is wonderful, but in time we can make the same mistake and again find ourselves spiritually dry. What we have to do is shift our attention from the bucket to the water, and when we do, any bucket can be of great service. Every religion has contemplative practices for drawing up water from the well. So, perhaps the advice is - don't worry about finding the right religion, find the right practice, the one that works for you. Once you have found it you will never leave it.

So, tonight, let's reclaim the word 'Church', let's take the religion out of our connection to God, and focus on the energy instead. Let us create a church with harmlessness and growth at its core, and have it become a vehicle for remembering our connection to the Universal Power, pictured within your own wisdom in whatever way you picture it.

Then commit to showing up. Being present. Making time in the busyness of Life to focus on Spirit. Busyness is now a status symbol of Success. If one is perceived to be busy, one must be successful. If you are able to walk quickly down a street and talk at the same time on your mobile, and wear a suit, then of course you must be very successful indeed! The result of all these busyness is that we have forgotten where we are going, in the race to keep up. We have become hostile, hurried and humourless, overtaking cars in the rush hour race into the city, just to arrive there 12 feet or five seconds before the car behind us.

We don't have time for family, other than follow an automatic roster of events from the moment we awake to the moment we relax, at the end of our day, whenever that is, when Responsibility stops. We react with cross faces, tense words, stressed body when this precious and automatic routine is interrupted by someone who either is unaware of the roster, or is more developed in joyous spontaneity and simplicity of life, such as children.

We fail to notice the wisdom of being out of sync with the Busyness Roster. We fail to notice the Buddha on our path, the hint from the Universe that it is time to just STOP. And Breathe. And feel the calmness of the Present.

We must always make time for this calmness, this connection to our wise calm centre within us that understands that beneath the rush of life and the burden of responsibility, we are still here, connected, still part of a greater power, still part of the Oneness - and that all we have to do to grow this connection is to commit to making time for it, whether it is once a day, once a week, or once a fortnight, here in this space, called Church.

There is always time for Spirit, regardless of what of the reality of your life. Indeed, while three-quarters of Australians believe in a Higher Power, just 25% go to Church. If God was taken out of Religion, and we slowed down our pace of Busyness, would this figure increase, perhaps?

There will always be other commitments in life you would rather not have. There are passionate pursuits, perhaps still buried deep within you, that you have not had the time to uncover or develop as yet, because of the need to be pay bills and live in a home. The poet Wallace Stevens, an insurance executive by day and a creative, passionate poet by night, said that it was poetry that gave his life meaning, but his job kept him out of poverty. I like that attitude: a willingness to do several things at once, to be practical and visionary.

Make time to grow your passion. Fit it into your life, for without it, life is not as rich, and you are not as present in your life. Make time for spiritual practice, for this, in itself, may be the link between you and your purpose, you and your passion. Everything is connected - your path towards your purpose if you make the time for it, prepares you for loving relationships, relaxing into a level of greater abundance, strength in health and a heightened self-esteem. As we relax, so we receive. Less struggle, more reward. No more pushing, striving, but trusting and surrendering to the necessary flow of life. We are like waves on a beach - coming in to claw our way up the sands, having experiences that can often leave part of ourselves behind, whilst taking part of us forward; and then coming back into the Ocean of Oneness, reacting as a group - sometimes in fear, other times in leadership.

We are just like water - soft to the touch, but with a hardness that can change the contours of a rockface if we repeat the action enough. What do the contours look like on the rockface against your force of water so far this life? Is there a pattern of stubborn resistance to change or are you breaking a cycle with noble persistence?

To access our connection to Universal Power, all we have to do is let go. The artist Katie Hoffman, for instance, rarely knows what she is about to paint, and that's the way she likes it. Of her paintings, she says "the more I try to exert my will onto the canvas, the more it seemed to resist. I was ready to stop being an artist. There was nothing left to lose, so in desperation I applied more paint to obscure what was there and began to gouge at the surface. As this violence removed the layers, something emerged that was richer and more interesting than anything I could have strived, in all of my effort, to put there."

Michelangelo, the Italian sculptor and painter, once said in response to a question as to how he managed to create such beautiful forms from a block of marble. "In every block of marble I see a statue as plain as though it stood before me, shaped and perfect in attitude and action. I have only to chisel away the rough walls that imprison the lovely apparition to reveal it to the other eyes as mine see it."

What if, imprisoned within your own block of marble, is a perfectly formed angel, a form of great beauty and capacity to love, to receive, to come from the heart in all things?

So... breathe down into that bright light somewhere within you, the part of you that knows how to connect. Breathe down past the layers that cover this for you. If it is depression, know that it is only there to feed our story of how things should be rather than our capacity to face reality as it is. If this is pain, you may have forgotten to trust intuition, and instead have turn to others around you for opinions, or solutions. If it is guilt, underneath is helplessness that comes from not remembering the wisdom of your connection to solutions, if there is regret, perhaps there is also a failure to understand, if there is confusion, perhaps the gift beneath this is that you are suddenly open to noticing new doorways instead of being fixed upon a particular option, if it is anger, know that our anger means we are controlling or trying to control, if it is grief, then you have been softened by the forced reflection that only comes with Loss, your heart is more open and when our hearts are open, we can do anything. So breathe down into your heart, down beyond the layers that keep you away from who you truly are, inside.

It is said that if God wanted to hide, the first place he or she would hide, would be inside a human being, because that is the last place we would look. Inside all of us is a Light, an angel hidden underneath the layers of life.

Then turn to someone next to you tonight, and look, really look into those eyes, the windows to the soul. Look for the angel inside this person. Easy to see in some, for others look deeper, see the angel within, underneath everything.

There are two types of people in the world; those who believe there are two types of people and those who do not.

In Indian spirituality, there is a mantra, Om Namaha Shiva - which simply means 'the Divinity within me, recognises the Divinity within you' - so look now and see that spark of Divinity in your neighbour here tonight, the part of them that makes you in this moment, one and the same.

Dr Viktor Emil Frankl, was an Austrian neurologist and psychiatrist as well as a Holocaust survivor. His book *Man's Search for Meaning*, published in 1946, chronicles his experiences as a concentration camp inmate. The camps, he wrote, revealed man as a creature driven by ego and instinct and sublimated drives. But they reveal something even more fundamental- our defining 'capacity for self-transcendence.'

"Man is that being who invented the gas chambers of Auschwitz; however, he is also that being who entered those chambers upright, with the Lord's Prayer or the Shema Yisrael on his lips."

He also writes of the long days of back-breaking work to the point of exhaustion.

On the morning march to the labour site, we stumbled on for miles, slipping on icy spots, supporting each other time and again, dragging one another upward and onward, nothing was said, but we both knew: each of us was thinking about his wife. Occasionally I looked at the sky, where the stars were fading and the pink light of the morning was beginning to spread behind a dark bank of clouds. My mind clung to my wife's image, imagining it with uncanny acuteness. I heard her answering me, saw her smile, her frank and encouraging look. . . . A thought transfixed me: for the first time in my life I saw the truth as it is set into song by so many poets, the truth - that love is the highest goal to which man can aspire. . . . I understand how a man who has nothing left in this world may still know bliss. . . . In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way - an honourable way - in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfilment. For the first time in my life I was able to understand the meaning of the words, "The angels are lost in divine contemplation of an infinite glory."

His spiritual connection allowed Frankl to not only survive his horrendous three years at Aushwitz, but to live. As the Buddhists say, Pain is inevitable, but Suffering is not. What new choice can each of us bring to the challenges in our own lives?

What are you ready to transcend from yesterday's thoughts, choices and opinions?

What do we do in times of pain? We stop trusting. Why do you have challenge in our life, if not as a way to measure our strength?

I remember my first parachute jump 18 years ago. The chute didn't open, and I remembering looking up and seeing a thin stream of material rather than the open umbrella. I had a choice in that moment - to trust and listen to my inner wisdom and connection with Spirit, or to lose all hope and forget to hear. I listened and spun my body to the left, which unfurled the material.

As soon as I landed safely, I got up and got back onto the next plane going up, to jump for a second time to prove to myself that I was alive.

It is said that everything will be OK in the end, and if we don't feel OK right now, it is because we are not yet at the end.

And it is with this sense of connection to trust, that whatever our current challenge, that this too shall pass, that we can once more move forward in life, assisting others by simply choosing to step into the best of who we really are.

As Marianne Williamson said, and these words were echoed by Nelson Mandela in his inauguration speech, "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."

With this innate connection to our own wisdom and light and to each other, let us create a Church of togetherness, from which we can all move forwards. There are two paths to enlightenment - one of transcendence, learning how to trust our connection to God, the other transformation, taking personal responsibility for the lessons, challenges and choices we act upon. We cannot do one, without the other.

Create new rituals for you and your family. There is nothing scared about tradition unless it works. Here are a few that may interest you.

### **Unhappy Hour**

During this gala moan festival each Tuesday afternoon for instance, you will have licence to howl and mutter about everything that hurts your feelings. Make sure you take everything as personally as possible, and exaggerate the level of drama to award-winning. Having flushed out all one's venom in one neat spew, one is then free to enjoy generous thought and expansive calmness the rest of the week.

### **Dare to be Boring Day**

We all deserve a break from the oppressive demands to appear smart and entertaining. On Dare to be Boring Day, it will be socially unacceptable to demonstrate your wit and verve. Long-winded, rambling monologues are mandatory, the more clichés and buzzwords you use, the better! Tell old worn-out stories that your friends have already heard several hundred times. Fill these talks with awkward silences. Discuss at length your plans for switching washing powders, or the collection of matchbooks you had as a child and the time you almost went to Italy, but didn't.

## **Do What You Fear Festival**

First you make a list of the 100 things you are most afraid of. Next, you rate them from one to 100 in order of how badly they scare you. Then you agree to stop obsessing about the bottom 97 because they distract you from the three really interesting ones. Finally you brainstorm about how you are actually going to conquer those top three fears by doing them.

Or better still, assume that you have two weeks to live. If so, who would you love more, forgive, complete with, and what would you do for yourself?

More new and refreshing rituals next service, but for now, I think you get the picture.

Make this fortnightly Sunday an opportunity to observe your progress towards becoming who you are supposed to be, that your gift to your family is your happiness, not your suffering! There is a great Power in Choice. Make this gathering place an oasis, a place of reflection, committing to seeing every moment afresh, as if for the first time, living as you choose to NOW live, regardless of what old rules and restrictions from the past you have carried in here tonight. Leave them here, let go, and begin the next chapter in trust and faith.

As the 13th Century Persian mystic and poet Rumi, said:

"Out beyond ideas of wrong-doing and right-doing, there is a field.

I will meet you there."