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A Story Still Unfolding: Feast of Trinity (John 16: 12-15)

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Twice the writer of John's gospel insists that the story he's called to tell exceeds what he has written. At the end of Chapter 20, we read: 'Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name' (20:30-31). And a chapter later, in words that conclude the whole gospel, John reiterates: 'there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written' (21:25).

Repetition, in biblical writing, is always a clue to significance – and John's insistence on this point strikes me as theologically extremely important. For one thing, it subverts the perennial temptation of religious folk to think that we have got God taped, safely contained and labelled in the stories we tell and the traditions we hand on. No – God exceeds all our telling, all our words – and that includes the words of Scripture itself. No less an authority than John the evangelist is reminding us not to mistake the text of the bible for the fullness of God's truth and presence.

And it's not just that the person of Jesus exceeds the story John tells of him; Jesus himself says that there is 'more to come' in the story of God with us. 'I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all truth' (16:12). We are, in other words, caught up in a still unfolding story and this means there's always room for us to grow – in understanding and in our capacity to receive. There's always need for us to be open to a future still being realized in and among us.

That's a promise I find exciting! And today – as we celebrate the feast of Trinity – I'd like to share with you something that seems to be emerging in the life of *our* community, as part of *our* unfolding story with God. It's something that's been part of my sense of call for a while now, something that the Benedictus Council has been speaking about, and it feels time to share it with all of you and invite your participation in listening to how the Spirit might be leading us.

I have a vision about a home for Benedictus – a community house, if you like. Let me be clear that I'm not talking about getting our own church or worship space. I have no sense of needing to move from this space at Holy Covenant for our weekly service. But I do have a vision, which I know others share, for a place where we might gather at other times. A place where Kaleidoscope – our contemplative children's afternoons could be held and where our young adults' discernment group might meet. A place where there might be daily meditation offered after work – for anyone who wants to drop in. A place which offers a quiet space to spend some time during the day, or the possibility of a cuppa and chat over the kitchen table, or a community garden to help create.

John Main said that one of the paradoxical features of the practice of silent meditation is that it creates community. Meditation draws us beyond the masks and defences we develop to protect our vulnerability, and opens us to the possibility of genuine relationship and sharing of life. This means that one of the gifts a contemplative community can offer is non-anxious hospitality.

This seems important and counter-cultural in a context where many experience loneliness and isolation, while others struggle with frenetic busy-ness and lack of space simply to be. I imagine a place which offers a ministry of presence, and a tangible expression of the friendship of Trinitarian love. It would be a community space for Benedictus itself – which will support us in our contemplative practice, enable some of the programs we offer, *and* be somewhere to invite others to share in and be nourished by the life of our community.

There's another dimension too. At the end of last year, I said that I'd been approached by a number of different people, from different walks of life, who were wanting to explore faith. The story of Nicodemus, who came inquiring of Jesus at night-time, resonates for me as I think of these people because they (like Nicodemus) are often in contexts hostile to their exploration of faith and spiritual meaning. Some are struggling to find ways of engaging these questions that seem real, relevant and not an abandonment of their integrity. They'd be uncomfortable – at least at first – to come along to a Saturday worship service, but they are hungry for a place to go for conversation and companionship on their spiritual journey. Relatedly, I believe there's a profound need for us to find ways of intelligently engaging theology and faith with our life in the world, and to participate in conversations for the common good. So the idea of something called the Nicodemus Centre – a place for theological inquiry, conversation and engagement has been in my mind for several years now, and it won't seem to let me go!

I can imagine different things being offered. A theology and spirituality reading group. A retreat series for professionals focusing on questions of discerning vocation and sustaining integrity in systems that often feel compromised and compromising. I can imagine hosting theologically informed conversations about matters of public significance. I'm not interested in creating simply a 'think tank' or academic centre. There's a necessary relationship between deepening theological reflection and the lived experience of faith – and that's why I see the Nicodemus Centre and a house for community and prayer as part of the same vision, and part of the ministry of a thoughtful, contemplative community like ours.

These are beginning thoughts – places I imagine we might start – but who knows what else could unfold once a certain kind of space is created and begins to generate its own energy and life?

In Latin America in the 1970s and 80s, liberation theology emerged as a powerful movement for justice in the context of oppressive political systems and gross economic inequity. Liberation theologians recognised the need, in such a

context, for what they called ‘base communities’ which nourished and empowered the poor to resist injustice and become agents of mercy and truth in their difficult circumstances. Our circumstances here in Canberra aren’t, seemingly, so dire. Certainly most of us are materially much more privileged. Yet – there are facets of our economic, social and political systems that also cry out for resistance and transformation.

I think of the struggle of many families to stay healthy and sane amidst the demands of work and school performance, overscheduling and relationship strain; the struggle of bureaucrats to be *allowed* to speak truth to power and of academics, CSIRO scientists, teachers and health professionals to fulfil their real calling in the face of budget cuts and managerial excess. I think of the corruption and dumbing down of political discourse, and the impact of this systemic untruthfulness on our capacity to respond to issues like climate change, the mass movement of people and economic reform.

What if together we could create a space, a kind of base community, that stood for something else? That gave people a context to deepen their listening for the call on their lives, to be nurtured and sustained by the companionship and conversation of one another, to explore how the peace and truth of God might be more fully realised in our professional, social and family lives, and so begin to transform the systems of which we are part?

The feast of the Trinity celebrates the living, relational, dynamic quality of the divine life. Today we acknowledge that we’re part of an unfolding story – God’s future still being realized in and among us. Do you hear something in what I’ve shared for Benedictus? Does it connect with the Spirit’s leading in your life, and with your sense of need and hope? Let me know – let’s be in conversation. Oh – and if you happen to know of a large house available for use – feel free to let me know that as well!!