

This week I have been spending a bit of time on the internet looking at ebay for a few books and things I have been chasing. If you are not familiar with the world of the internet, ebay is an online auction house where you can buy practically anything from all over the world – often at bargain prices. I spent most of my time looking through the pages of Christian or church goods that people were selling – crosses, CDs, stained glass windows, pews, vestments, candles and so on. One particular item really caught my attention – a single potato chip! In the religious section! Or for us poms – a potato crisp. A person actually was selling a single potato chip – but they claimed that this chip has an apparition of Jesus on it. There are photographs of the chip - but for me it was just like seeing faces in the clouds –then again I’m a skeptic when it comes to things like this. I’m even more of a skeptic when I read that the chip is being sold – and hopefully will bring in more than \$1000 to help pay bills! The postage is \$25 and the chip comes gift wrapped in a sturdy plastic case surrounded by cotton wool and tissues. People have actually bid on the item – but the winning bid is not likely to be much more than about \$10. Seeing Jesus on a potato chip –yes I think it is far fetched...to sell it - even stranger. I don’t think I’ve ever held a chip long enough to see images on it –they taste too good.

We each have such a varied way of expressing our faith. For me it is tempting to put this person into the crazy category because his or her experience and understanding of God is different from my own. Paul in his letter to the Corinthians is dealing with a community that is divided –each claiming to be the authentic expression of Christianity. Sounds very familiar – a first century issue that refuses to go away. We have seen much evidence of it throughout history – the Inquisition, crusades and wars-even bigotry much closer to home. There is so much focus on what our differences are rather than the one central figure – Christ, which should unite, rather than divide us.

I grew up in a culture where my particular brand of Christianity was the only “real” one. It really is destructive because this attitude sets up a “us and them” mentality and really affects how we think about others and behave towards them – often seeing “them” as spiritually inferior to ourselves, and being fearful and suspicious of what “they” do. People become passionate about their faith –which is a good thing, but when combined with the fuel of fear, fundamentalism and elitism there is an explosive potential which exists – no wonder there is so much war and division!

Initially it may surprise some people to discover that the Holy Spirit isn’t confined to a particular religion, church or denomination. Christ is encountered and experienced across the spectrum. (We all know Jesus *really* was an Anglican, but someone earlier this week put forward a good argument to suggest he was in fact a Baptist!!) (only joking of course!) But seriously, just as Paul exhorted the Corinthian church saying,

“all of you should be in agreement and that there should be no divisions among you, but you should be united in the same mind and the same purpose”as modern Christians we too need reminding that we share much in common – indeed the ultimate –faith in Jesus Christ. How can we preach the gospel to a spiritually hungry world when we have divisions among us? What image do we show to the world when we wage war in the name of religion or pass judgment on those who are different to us? I think generally churches are moving in a more positive direction and recognizing that their own particular expression isn’t the “only” or “more pure” way. We join forces with other denominations here in Denmark to pray and sing Carols and to support those less fortunate in the community. We need to continue to do this – and to invite others to join – and to echo last week’s message “to come and see.”

But in the past there have been lots of divisions – not just between churches, but even closer to home. Within our own parish community and Diocese. There has been hurt – and in order for us to function as a healthy community in the wider forum we need to acknowledge our hurts, our own weaknesses, to give them voice, to seek reconciliation and to move on.

Lent is rapidly approaching, and this lent our parish –both here and in Walpole will be participating in a Lenten study designed to address these issues. All parishes across the Bunbury Diocese are encouraged to take part in this. I encourage people to think seriously about participating in this program so that we can move on and be an active part of a more unified, healthy community and preach the gospel in our lives.

I don’t think any of us intend selling potato chips on the internet – but as Christians we have lots in common with this person... we too are fools. To be a Christian is to be a fool – just as Christ was a fool.

We’ve just traveled the journey of Advent and Christmas, and soon we are to embark on the Lenten-Easter journey. These are the pinnacles of our celebrations as Christians. Through the Christmas narrative, we rediscovered a God who works in ways that are outside the way we would expect.... The God who comes to us in the weakness and vulnerability of an infant –born to a peasant mother in an obscure village. At Easter, this same God surrenders again into human hands, is charged, tried and tortured as a criminal –then hung on a tree.

The cross is foolishness to those who are perishing This again shows how God transforms and transcends our human understandings of power and weakness. Everything is turned upside down. In worldly terms, God is foolish –very foolish. Power, might, prosperity and dominion are the ways of the world. The transforming power of the cross is to be found in the power of weakness. And each of us, like Paul are to proclaim the gospel, that’s what our Baptism commissions us to do, but

not in eloquent wisdom...but through the ordinariness and simplicity of our lives....through our everyday actions and communications. Through our weakness...through the cross. The more ordinary we are, the more powerful the message can be. Resurrection and transformation give us a new way of seeing. We begin to experience God in unlikely places – perhaps we may begin to see the face of Christ in that work colleague we can't stand, or the skate-boarding teenager that we dodge in the street, maybe even –God forbid –ourselves!

Following Christ is radical –the cross is foolishness. Jesus was considered to be mad by even his own family. Jesus was a fool by worldly standards. We are invited to come be a fool as well!

In the words of the Psalmist “My heart has said of you, ‘seek his face’, your face Lord, I will seek.”