

## **Who was I then? Who am I now? Who will I become?**

A Lenten message of reflection considering who we are at various stages in our lives and the consistent love of Jesus for us in spite of the change we experience.

28/2/21

I speak in the name of Jesus the Christ, in the power of the Holy Spirit, to the glory of God the Father.

Amen.

Let us pray:

Almighty God, who sees that we have no power of ourselves to help ourselves: Keep us both outwardly in our bodies, and inwardly in our souls; that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Who liveth and reigneth with thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end.

Amen.

The Lord be with you.

An extract from today's Gospel reading:

***Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said, "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me..."***

(Mark 8: 34)

In 1902, a gentleman by the name of Rilke wrote back to a young man named Kappus saying the following...

*“You are so young, all still lies ahead of you, I should like to ask you to be patient towards all that is unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves. Do not now strive to uncover answers: they cannot be given you because you have not been able to live them. And what matters is to live everything. Live the questions for now. Perhaps then you will gradually live your way into the answer.”*

I recently had an unusually out of body experience that was quite powerful in terms of my lenten journey and when this happened recently, I knew that I needed to explore the deeper theological symbolism and what it could mean for you and I in terms of our spiritual journeys. If you are indeed a friend of mine on Face Book, you might be familiar with the essence of the story I wish to share with you this morning. If not, hold onto your pew as you grapple with what these ideas may mean for you.

A couple of weekends ago, two to be precise, I helped my friend and colleague, Paul Muspratt-Williams, to move into his new annex at Anhouse where he has been appointed Warden. So, after church here at St Pauls two Sundays ago, I drove up to Anhouse at 13 Stanley Road and helped Paul move his furniture into his new home. Yes, Rondebosch is familiar to me but I have never spent much time really reflecting on the years that I have lived in Rondebosch in the past.

All was well. When Paul and I finished moving the furniture into his annex, we decided that it would be good practice and appropriate to light a fire and braai ourselves some lunch. A fair wind had arisen which scuppered our plans to braai in the beautiful front garden, so we moved the braai into the back courtyard, which was sheltered and conveniently close to his front door.

Once the fire was lit and burning, Paul had gone off to prepare the food we were going to cook and I was left alone for a while. I turned around and was greeted by the gate to the Anhouse property that I had already used a few times that day, except this time it was different. This time I was looking out of the Anhouse gate into Stanley Road, not standing just off Stanley Road and looking into the gate and into the Anhouse property.

I was stunned.

I just stared.

For there, walking up the slight incline, in his takkies, shorts and t shirt, clutching his leather bound folder, was a young man, slightly stooped, slightly worried, walking at a fair pace up the long hill, obviously walking up to the UCT campus.

I stared again.

I wasn't sure what to do.

I turned around and tended to the fire, hoping that the apparition I had just seen was just a fleeting moment of madness.

I turned around again and stared out of the gate.

There was the young man again. Starting at the bottom of the hill and walking up past the Anhouse gate, seemingly oblivious to me staring at him.

I continued to stare.

You see, that young man I was staring at, was me.

It was me twenty-seven years ago. I was twenty-five years old. I was walking up to campus to attend my daily lectures. I was in the process of converting my divinity degree to be able to teach.

Has something like this ever happened to you?

It most certainly was a first time for me!

Let me continue...

As I stared at the young man, who seemed to still have a lot of hair, by the way, various thoughts flooded through my mind...

- Do I go and chat to him?
- If I do go and have a conversation with the younger me, do I tell him it is me or actually him?
- If I do go and have a conversation with him, what would I say?

The answers are not so easy and I have spent a full two weeks reflecting on how that conversation with a younger me could have gone...

Some of the ways the conversation could have gone could be...

- Hi, it's me, or actually you. Are you ok? I can see that you are worried and stressed? How is university actually going? How are you feeling about your dreams and goals? What is your spiritual journey with Jesus like now that you have left the ministry?

Or...

- Hi, it's me or actually you. Listen to me. You are going to go through some pretty rough stuff. You are going to get married but you are also going to get divorced. You are going to buy a house but you are also going to lose it. You are going to have a beautiful daughter but you are also not going to see her for a long time. You are going to experience joy and laughter but you are also going to experience pain and loss...

What would you have said to your younger self?

After a while, I began to realise that there were no correct words for the younger me.

There were many and there were none.

What could the younger me have asked of the older me?

How would I have answered?

What would I have said?

What would you have said?

After much reflection, I realised that there would have been a conversation.

A short one but a conversation none the least.

How would this have all gone down?

Imagine this scenario for a moment...

I light the fire.

Paul goes inside to prepare the food.

I turn around and see this young man walking up Stanley road.

I open the gate.

I walk out onto the street.

I greet the young man.

He greets me back.

Now I carry all the knowledge and life experience of the last thirty years of what he still has to go through... that is not important. That is his journey that he must live and experience for himself.

So...

After the polite greeting, I imagine that the conversation would go something like this...

“Hi.”

“Hi.”

“You don’t know me, but I would like to just take a minute and say something. I know you have a lecture to get to.”

“Oh, ok.”

“Keep the faith.”

“What do you mean.”

“Just that.”

“The faith?”

“Yes.”

“Ok.”

“What I mean is, I know that you are struggling with many things at the moment. I know that you feel distanced from the church. I know that you are worried about money. I know that you are worried about building a career. I know that you are worried about establishing yourself.”

“Yes, you are correct. I am struggling.”

“That’s ok. The struggle never goes away. Ever.”

“Oh. Never?”

“Never.”

“Oh.”

“Keep the faith.”

“I will.”

“Believe in yourself.”

“Ok. I do try.”

“That cross that Jesus died on for you, it isn’t going away.”

“I know. I just feel distant sometimes...”

“It’s ok. I know.”

“I must go. I have a lecture to get to.”

“I know.”

“Jesus loves you.”

“Thank you.”

“So do I.”

“Thank you.”

“Take care.”

“You too.”

You see, whatever we go through in life, and we all have our own personal journeys to struggle through, the Cross remains central and prevalent in our lives. It is always there, always available, always caring, always waiting...

Jesus calls us to take up our own cross and follow Him. This is an ongoing struggle for all of us. Ask me. There have been months and years where the last thing I wanted to consider was the Cross of Jesus and all that this could mean for my life. I chose to distance myself. The beautiful thing about the Cross of Jesus is that everytime I turn around and choose to face the Cross again, Jesus has the grace and forgiveness to make it available for me again. That is what I mean when I say keep the faith. We will all have times where we struggle with our faith and spiritual journey. That is ok. That is part of life and what it means to be human. The important thing is to remember that the Cross never goes away, we can turn back to it at any time in our lives. It is there, waiting patiently and gracefully for us all.

Live the questions.

Keep the faith.

Oh, and perhaps be ready for that conversation one day with the younger you. You never know who you are going to bump into these days!

I wish you a peaceful and restful Sunday.

Every blessing for the week ahead.

Fr Darron.