

The Post Christendom Age

If ever we needed proof that the age of Christendom was well and truly over, it came in the form of a message from a local anti-cancer group, organising a Fun Run to raise funds for the Holman Clinic here in Launceston. The message said that Paterson Street would be closed for the run from 10.00am on Sunday 14th March. This is the time that we worship here at Pilgrim.

A local fun run for thousands of people is seen as more important than the worshipping practices of a hundred or so Christians on a Sunday morning. And I make this point not because I believe that this is a bad thing that we will be prevented from worshipping in our usual place, at our usual time, but because it shows clearly where “Church” is in the Post Christendom Age.

The Age of Christendom in the Western world was a time when the State and the Church worked hand in glove. From the time the Emperor Constantine told the Roman world that their official religion would be Christian (or else!), the Church became respectable, was given advantages and wealth and the patronage of the high and mighty. And whilst these advantages led to a positive transformation in society, they also led to a Church in many ways diminished by secular patronage that always came with strings attached. Far from her origins with the poor, the Church became associated with the rich and powerful and ended up serving their considerable needs at the expense of the poor. So you can guess that I’m not too sad about the demise of Christendom. The privileged position the Church has enjoyed over centuries has only served to make her fat and complacent. And it is coming to an end!

As I See It, the Post Christendom Age allows the Church to more faithfully live as the Body of Christ. In effect this will allow our congregations to return to life giving activities more akin to what Jesus preached and lived. It frees us to speak out and act for the poor and marginalised, to be aligned with the disadvantaged and oppressed rather than over-advantaged and powerful. It means that we can shed the cloak of respectability that in the past prevented us from rocking the societal boat.

But such a place is a scary place in which to live, for it means we are cut adrift from the certainties of the past. However, as Christ’s Body on earth, we are not left alone. For me the upside of living in a Post Christendom world is that it will force us to rely more on the God we say we follow and less upon the powers that be. We are in fact now being asked to live out our faith in the way that Jesus modelled with his living, dying and rising – to lose our life so that we might gain the only life worth anything – the Christ life.

So we will be going elsewhere to worship on the morning of the 14th March, but we should take heart in the knowledge that the only patronage the Body of Christ is dependent upon is the love and mercy of God, and that of course comes with no strings attached.

Tony would be more than happy to chat about the above article with anyone who wants to.

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