

The phone rang loudly, it shattered what sleep I was having, on a Saturday night living 150 metres off the middle of Ponsonby Road. In those days before cell phones, it was a push button right next to the bed.

“Mr Malcolm, its Auckland Hospital here, we have your son Jonathan and he’s been hit on the head by a piece of wood. You had better come in.” Of course, Janet had woken up with the noise of the phone and so we sorted out that I would go to the Hospital and she would stay home with Stephen.

I jumped into the old Holden we had at the time, just barely awake and headed off down Ponsonby Road, then K Road to the Hospital. It’s not a long drive but at ¼ to 1 on a Sunday morning, it took forever. It was busier than rush hour on a Friday night. Every bar and night club seemed to be packed to the gunnels and there were people all over the place.

When I finally arrived, I was greeted by a plain clothes Policeman wearing a side arm. “Mr Malcolm we are getting ready to mount a Homicide Enquiry,” he told me. As you can imagine my heart fell through my shoes and spilt out on to the floor.

When I arrived at the Intensive Care Unit, I was met by two of Jonathan’s friends, Torva and Morgan. By getting him to the hospital as quickly as they did, these two great young people saved his life. It turned out that Jon and his group of friends, all kids from Ponsonby and Herne Bay, had been having a bit of a get together on one of the small Herne Bay beaches beneath one of the parent’s homes. Another group of kids had turned up from down south and out east, and because of something that had happened earlier in the evening with another group of local Ponsonby kids, were on the war path.

Jon got up to go and see what was happening, and one on the older boys from the other group hit him in the head, with the full swing of a baseball bat.

He was 15, the other boy was 18.

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I found there was nothing like sitting in a major city intensive care unit, waiting to see if one of your kids is going to die, to make you think seriously about what you believe.

...

I came across this very arresting statement in the reading I was doing for the sermon this morning, **“Can faith be found in the rubbish of shattered dogma?”**

My conclusion was, that almost everything is rubbish apart from the “knowing” that God is with us, and that Jesus loves us ... no matter what happens, no matter what the outcome of things are. This is all that is important. And that having the love of family and others in support and prayer is the most generous sustaining gift there is, from every person who bows a knee.

In our gospel text today, we have two broken hearted, grief stricken, beaten down disciples journeying for the first time in Luke, away from Jerusalem, heavy in heart and spirit. They have witnessed a state murder, a capital crime, and with this horror, all their hopes and dreams for the future have been crushed. “We had hoped that he would be the one.” A one they loved and followed, a one they hoped in, a one they believed in. He has been taken from them, and they are carrying the tremendous, broken weight of that, as they trudge wearily on.

There is nothing like seeing a hoped for, loved and idolised Messiah murdered on a cross, to make you think seriously about what you believe.

“Can faith be found in the rubbish of shattered dogma?”

Suddenly a stranger joins them. As readers of the text, we know who this is, but the two companions have no idea. He is not easily recognisable by sight, but later they will say to one another that they “knew him.” “That their hearts burned within them.”

As they journey on together, talking and discussing all that has happened, the stranger seems to teach them, somehow helping them align what has happened, with all that they have been thinking about.

As it’s becoming dark, the companions invite the stranger to stay ... and lo and behold “in the breaking of the bread” Jesus is made known to them.

Not by sight, or appearance, but by invitation and sacramental action.

In this moment, they remember, and he is revealed, and all that heavy grief and sorrow weight they have been carrying disappears, so much so that they run the 10km’s back to Jerusalem in the moonlight, to tell the other disciples what has happened.

In moments like these we find out what it is that we really believe. Whether sitting in an ICU waiting for a death, or walking out of Jerusalem, carrying the weight of crushed and destroyed hopes on our shoulders.

Can faith be found in the rubbish of shattered dogma?

Many of us will have had experiences like this, or will know of family or friends for whom these kinds of things have happened. Moments, situations, experiences, when all of what we believe is up for grabs.

Moments when all of what we know about God is under the spotlight, all of what we have been taught is placed under the microscope, put in the furious furnace of living to see what floats to the top. Gold or scum?

For me, it was the gold that nothing matters other than knowing God is with us, and Jesus loves us ... no matter what happens ... and having others love you and pray for you when things are grim ... this is gold and everything else just rubbish.

For our two companions, the seeing came in the “breaking of bread,” and then in the “knowing,” and then burning presence of Jesus in the scriptures,” in this, all their theological, doctrinal, and messianic questions and worries disappeared. All the weight of a crushed, smashed world fell away ... and they were running free.

Can faith be found in the rubbish of shattered dogma?

Yes, it can ... sometimes ... it is in the only place we can find it.

Amen.