

Ash Wednesday

“Jesus, Paternoster and the ankle bracelet”

1/3/17

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

As a young teenager I had the privilege of learning to sail small fourteen foot catamarans. I cut my teeth off the beach at Hout Bay on weekends. Once the holidays came along, my Dad took my brother and I along to Langebaan. This beautiful lagoon offered relatively safe sailing and constant winds. Soon I developed a deep love for the West Coast... it came to symbolise deserted white beaches, cold water, strong winds and peace.

Earlier this year I had the opportunity to spend a few days in a renovated labourer's cottage some eight kilometres outside of Paternoster. (This by the way is Latin for the “Lord's Prayer”)

The cottage has all the basic amenities and what I love about it the most is the sense of peace and tranquillity one feels when staying there. Shannon is able to hone her skills driving the Land Rover on the farm and I am able to catch up on my reading and sleep...

My usual attire is my swimming costume, an old t-shirt and my crocs. (as well as a hat as I don't have much hair!) However, this time I had stepped out a bit into rebel mode and was also wearing my leather ankle bracelet. This wasn't just any leather ankle bracelet. It was first of all a unique one-off design with special beads. It was special because it was made by my sister especially for me as a gift back in 1994! My sister is a few years younger than me and she was raising funds for her air ticket to go overseas. I have safely kept this ankle bracelet in my cupboard, wearing it occasionally during my school holidays, always looking after it.

For some or other reason, I had decided to wear it to Paternoster, on my right ankle and, as many of you would know, after a while you do not feel the bracelet anymore, it almost becomes part of your body. Shannon and I went

about our usual business, making a fire, going for walks on the beach and driving off road in the lovely sand tracks.

After a day or two of really relaxing and enjoying ourselves, I happened to glance down at my right ankle and noticed, with absolute disbelief and horror, that my ankle bracelet was gone!

I was devastated.

I immediately started to retrace my steps around the cottage. The only problem was, one of the areas I had been walking was infested with rather large ants which specialised in painful bites wherever they could find skin. So here I was desperately searching for my bracelet amongst the sand, stones and bushes whilst doing some kind of gumboot dance as I picked up my feet and attempted to slap the ants off...

I wasn't very successful, either at finding my bracelet, or keeping the ants off me...

I eventually enlisted the help of Shannon to try and help me find my bracelet. We continued searching around the cottage. She even suggested driving back to the sand dunes to have a look there. I had been sitting on my bulbar while she drove along the sand track. I realised that this was futile as we had covered quite a few kilometres.

I admitted defeat...

I was sad...

I began to question myself as to why I was feeling so sad...

I was actually quite shocked with myself as to how much this minor incident had thrown me...

Was it because it was a gift from my sister and in a way kept some sort of connection with her?

Was it because it was a piece of jewellery worth money?

Was it because I was irresponsible and careless with my possessions?

I began to rationalise my questions:

Firstly, my sister still loved me and I her, whether or not I had the bracelet in my possession.

Secondly, apart from sentimental value, the bracelet was worth nothing.

Thirdly, I know that I am someone who really looks after his possessions. This was an accident.

I began to realise that I was too attached to a material object and I was actually letting it affect my mood and holiday. I was quite ashamed with myself.

I realised that I need to LET THIS GO!

It is ok.

Let it go.

You can do this.

As I reflected upon this incident over the next few days before driving home, I was once again quite surprised how attached I was to something of earthly value. I realised that I had some work to do on myself. Perhaps there were other areas in my life that I also had to consciously let go...

Perhaps I needed to pray about:

- People I had hurt in the past... and asked forgiveness from
- Past friends that I had tried to reconnect with... and they were not interested in rekindling the friendship
- Material objects in my life that I am particularly attached to
- Guilt that I carry to this day about my failed marriage
- Not being the perfect Christian or priest

I slowly realised that there were many areas in my life that this ankle bracelet grew to symbolise... I needed to let these things go in my life, for they were, ultimately, holding me back from growing in the Holy Spirit and becoming more like Jesus.

This was a tough realisation.

I struggled.

When I eventually came home and unpacked my clothes, I took one look at the shelf where I would have put my bracelet back. I knew it was gone. I knew that I had changed. Something so small, had changed me so much...

You may recall that last year at Ash Wednesday I preached about ***looking back moving forward***. That sermon is available on the parish website if you wish to read it. That was all about refraining from looking back into the past too much and rather looking forward to the future, to the Cross of Jesus, and becoming the person you were meant to be, as opposed to missing the person you once were.

This Ash Wednesday, I encourage you to **LET GO** of whatever is holding you back from Jesus, from becoming the full person in Christ that you are meant to be! This will be a different journey for everyone sitting here tonight... we all have our own "stuff" that is holding us back and stopping us becoming "self-actualised" as Maslow would like to say.

Take some time out this Lent and focus on those things in your life and LET IT GO.

Jesus loves you.

Jesus has already forgiven you.

Let it go!

This is my challenge for you this Ash Wednesday...

But, wait there is more...

So the story continues...

About a month later I decide to do a bike trip up to Paternoster for the weekend... I was simply missing the West Coast too much and although I had only been back at work for a month, it felt like a year already!

This time, Alma, the owner of the cottage was home and she kindly allowed us to stay in her granny flat for the weekend. We arrived late on the Saturday afternoon, had a lovely chat and eventually decided to make a fire outside for a braai.

As I looked around one of the outside tables for the tongs and braai wood, there to my absolute amazement, lying forlornly and lost on the table, was my ankle bracelet!

I was absolutely stunned!

I immediately shouted out to Alma in joy and asked her where she had found this bracelet? She answered that it was around the area of the back door and she did not know who it belonged to, so she merely put it in on the outside table. A month later I come along, happen to glance at an outside table and happen to find my bracelet.

There was so much going through my mind...

Why has this object come back into my life?

What can I learn about this event?

Firstly, I realised that when we learn to let stuff go, gifts and blessings sometimes come back to us tenfold. This is part of the joy of letting stuff go, whatever that may be.

I also realised that Alma had looked after something she did not know who it belonged to. She played an important part in my journey without even realising it.

So, the lesson and challenge that I put to you this lent is:

- 1) Identify what is holding you back in your life: Let it Go and Let Jesus.
- 2) Be there for someone. Be as Jesus to someone. Whether it be someone you know or a total stranger. You might just do something small and innocent that will change someone's life without you even realising it.

Stop looking back and move forward.

Let it go!

May God bless you this Lenten journey as you discover those areas of your life that you need to let go so that He may fill your heart even more.

Amen.