

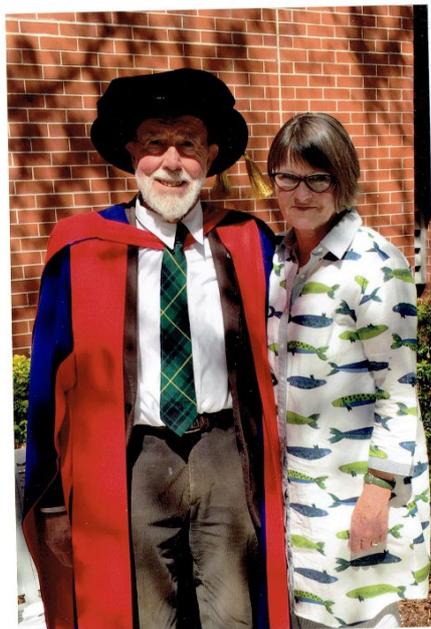
**Sermon. Leura.**

**Good Friday, 2020.**

**WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT?**

*I have been doing a lot of travelling during the last week of self-isolation, particularly to Athens fourth and fifth centuries BC.*

I have been reading Aristotle's thoughts on drama, as outlined in his *Poetics*. I was particularly interested in what Aristotle wrote about the unexpected, unpredictable happening.



I am going to take you back to a graduation that took place eighteen months ago. As it marked for me 50 years as a student, it seemed a milestone event that I should attend. At that event, the Deputy Chancellor handed me the award and remarked that I had made a habit of this. To which I replied, 'Yes, it keeps me off the streets'. It was an amusing exchange. **WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT** that eighteen months from that event we would be in the middle of an unexpected and unpredictable event, the pandemic and that I would be working on a new research project that would be, quite literally, 'keeping me off the streets'. **WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT** that an 'off the cuff' remark would have been so ironic and so prophetic eighteen months after this event. Certainly not myself, or the deputy chancellor.

About six months ago, before the pandemic, I attended at the University of Sydney entitled **Choose Your Own Apocalypse**. Upon entering the auditorium there was a series of film clips where Bruce Willis was in the process of saving the an attractive young heroine from an occurring apocalypse. When Bruce had finished his work. Four eminent Professors from agricultural science, climatology, astronomy and epidemiology gave their presentations on what would be the apocalypse from their disciplinary perspectives. Apocalypse being defined as 'destruction or damage on a catastrophic scale' A meteor, the size of which could threaten civilisation, is likely an occurrence that would be measured in millions of years. Rather more immediate were: the destruction of the world's insect population vital to sustain the nourishment of the soil; the increase in world temperatures that

could trigger catastrophic events such as rising sea levels; or a pandemic, such as the Spanish Flu of the early twentieth century? There was complete agreement among the presenters that Bruce Willis would not save us from any of these potential apocalypses.

The voting was most interesting. The climatologist and the agricultural scientist reaped the vast majority of the votes with the climatologist winning narrowly. The astronomer received a couple of votes (probably his relatives) . The epidemiologist had a mere sprinkling of votes. **WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT** that in six months from this event we would be in the midst of a pandemic? Obviously very few people among the seven or eight hundred people in the auditorium.

Let's shift our focus to today's reading. The scene, physical and moral, is desolate. The religious authorities of the day presented Jesus to Pontius Pilate demanding he be executed as an enemy of Caesar. Pilate, who distrusted the religious authorities, but who had no desire to be in Caesar's bad books, ultimately consented through political expediency, to Jesus' execution by crucifixion, washing his hands of the matter. (Pilate practised good hygiene, which we could emulate, but his ethics were decidedly 'on the nose'). Roman law had a zero tolerance for anyone who could be a threat to Roman rule. The Romans were intent on creating the two-class society. You were pacified, or you were dead.

So, Jesus hung on his cross between two offenders. The message was very clear to any passers-by. Don't mess with Rome, or even be thought to mess with Rome, or you could be the next one up there. A few demoralized followers of Jesus were present at the execution.

**WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT** that this scene was anything but a terminus! **WHO WOULD HAVE THOUGHT** that the unexpected the unpredictable would happen! No one in John's account in today's reading. Resurrection? There was absolutely no precedent. There still is not. We hear much of 'near-death experiences'. But, by definition, these are not death experiences. I have yet to hear an account from anyone who has been dead for three days. The crucifixion was desolation for those present, until the unexpected and entirely unpredictable happened.



The photo above was taken when I visited the Gallery of Modern Art in Glasgow just before setting out on a hike along the West Highland Way. Wonderful though the West Highland Way was, standing before this masterpiece by Salvadore Dali (until my hips ached from standing in the one

place) was my abiding memory. I could do my self-isolation at the Kelvin Grove Art Gallery and Museum in Glasgow!

I invite you to explore your thoughts before this painting. Perhaps bring up a better image if a computer is handy, and write your impressions. Perhaps you could share them with me. I would be delighted if you would.

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Grace and Peace,

Mel.

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen.