

Reflection 5 - 2017

Journeying as One

Recently I was lucky enough to go with a friend to a restaurant in Sydney called 'The Farmhouse'. The restaurant is different to most in that there is only one table and everyone gets the same food. Sitting at the one table meant that conversations opened up among those sitting around us. To my right was a couple celebrating a birthday. To my left was a family who were welcoming their daughter back from Melbourne and also meeting their other daughter's new boyfriend. For the two hours we sat together, it felt like we were all part of the birthday and all part of the 'family reunion'. We met as strangers and left as new friends. As we were walking home my friend and I said how refreshing the experience was, and somewhat different to the usual restaurant experience where you 'book a table'.

As a worldwide community although we are communicating more than ever, research shows we feel more disconnected than ever.

Last year a survey by [Lifeline Australia](#) showed that 60% of Australians often feel lonely and feel lonelier than ever before.

Researchers at [Harvard University](#) have found that loneliness can be as dangerous to someone's health as smoking. While in Papua New Guinea, there is a greater sense of community from which we all can learn, the fact that by 2050 the population is expected to reach 30 million poses challenges in maintaining the social fabric, as it does here in Australia.

Mother Theresa once said the biggest disease today is not leprosy or cancer, but rather the feeling of being unwanted, uncared for and deserted by everybody.

Here in Australia, approximately [2500 people](#) tragically take their own lives each year. In [Pacific Islands](#) which includes Papua New Guinea, suicide rates and among some of the highest in the world and in some parts double the global average.

An article in the [Catholic Health Association of America's 'Health Progress' magazine](#) said recently the reasons why people are taking their own lives are very complex and difficult to understand, a sense of community can help reduce the risk of suicide.

While some of the rise in loneliness has to do with the way we are communicating, with modern communication while instant actually leading to a reduced sense of belonging, it also relates to the overriding philosophy that is inherent in our wider world today. Rather than seeing ourselves as one, we are taught to focus on 'me and mine' and 'yours and ours'. Even worse we are now being taught to fear those who aren't 'us' or part of our circle.

While there have been wonderful examples both at home and abroad of connection in the face of terrible diversity, much of our society is still built more on separation and walls rather than inclusiveness and togetherness.

New York Times best selling author, [Marianne Williamson](#) says that almost all suffering in our society derives from our attachment to the kingdom of our personal self and seeing ourselves as separate. She says let's think about it psychologically,

“If I am wave in the ocean and I think that I am separate from other waves then how could I not be scared of the other waves? How could I not feel powerless? How could I not feel terrified that at any moment I might not feel overwhelmed by other waves. But if I think of myself as I really am - not separate from the other waves then I know that I am safe in the ocean and that the power of the ocean is my power too”.

[\(Tears to Triumph: The Spiritual Journey from Suffering to Enlightenment](#) Pages 58 and 59).

In Matthews' Gospel, Jesus reminds us of the need for community by saying “For where two or three gather in my name, I am there among them”(Matthew 18:20).

In Laudato Si, Pope Francis says ‘The daily experience of overcrowding and social anonymity can create a sense of uprootedness which spawns antisocial behaviour and violence. He says, “many people in these conditions are able to weave bonds of belonging and togetherness which convert overcrowding into an experience of community in which the walls of the ego are torn down and the barriers of selfishness are overcome”. He calls for interventions so that we don't cast strangers into the realm of ‘other’ but part of a ‘we’ that all of us are working to create (149-151).

So how do we find a renewed sense of community and create a culture of belonging?

Part of the solution is like most things and is the sum of many small steps, but it also means at times taking great strides. It is about replacing fear with love; me with ours. It is about taking our own sense of responsibility and for that of the other people and creatures of the planet. Every problem emerges from a mindset and every solution comes from a mindset as well. Einstein famously said that you can't solve a problem by the same thinking that was used to create it. We must as a planet create a new mindset (Source: New York Times - May 25 1946 and 23 June 1946).

In this we can learn from the other species on our Earth. The collective rhythm of a flock of birds is a good example - each seemingly in unison with each other, changing direction seamlessly, in sync and flying not as individuals but as one. Wouldn't it be wonderful if we could similarly fly through life as a society with a similar sense of oneness?

The shift in thinking is also about maintaining a connection with the essence of who we are and be open to the spirit working in our lives - a spirit that seeks us to open up and move beyond our ego of separateness and self.

During this month of July, may we be even more open to this spirit and discern and embrace the oneness into which the spirit is always calling us. It is calling us to oneness with each other, the universe and with God.

As we discern this call to unison, I invite you to join me in the following prayer by [Mary Wickham rsm](#):

God of our ordinary
days and nights,
God of extraordinary times,
together we pray-
guide our discerning
and our deciding.

Attune our hearts
to the murmurings
both of peace
and of disquiet,
so that, aware of
risk and of promise,
we move trustfully
into the future.

Uncloud our eyes to know
what we need to leave,
what to seek,
and what to hold for the journey,
that we will find our feet
on the right track,
walking the merciful path,
led by your unerring Spirit.

Together we pray-
for the love of Jesus,
with the help of Mary,
in the company of Catherine.

Amen.

JOHN ROCHESTER, COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER