

Today, I want to talk about poems - and how scripture is not only a source of wisdom, history and inspiration but how scripture is also poetry.

The history of the people of the bible is one that included several exiles with the first of these, described in the book of Exodus. There is a famous poem, which is closely connected to this first exile, by the English poet Shelley. We were required to learn it at secondary school.

It describes someone who, in his time, was the most powerful leader – in the world of the Jewish people enslaved in Egypt: the Pharaoh – probably Ramses the Great – whose Greek name was Ozymandias.

[Recite]

Poetry has a wonderful quality of being able to escape time.

Unlike history, which marks the past with dates and places, this poem could be about any great leader whose power in the end, comes to nothing.

So while the poem is certainly about history, it also contains meanings that are timeless.

Poetry then is a both/and sort of writing and this is also a very biblical.

Have you noticed how often the Bible tells both/and stories?

For example Jesus not only loves his disciples but he also despairs of their lack of faith.

Both/And.

To me, the ability to think in a poetic, both/and way is necessary to understand scripture.

For example there is the paradox that each of us is treasured by God and loved more fondly than we can know, despite our abject failure and disloyalty.

Telling both/and stories gives a remarkable ability to a story to escape time, using metaphor to achieve this. So, a word about metaphor before I continue:

In a movie about his life the poet Pablo Neruda is asked by his illiterate postman what is contained in all these letters he is fetching and carrying for him. Neruda says the letters contain poems. But what is a poem? the postman asks.

The poet replies: “something made from metaphors to help us describe our world”.

After a time the postman returns and asks: So if metaphors are used to help us describe the world; for what is the world a metaphor? And Neruda, this world famous man of letters is speechless, confounded by a question by an illiterate person to which he has no reply.

If we think of today’s bible reading as a poem: what of its metaphors and their meaning?

As a poem, this story of Jesus and the disciples crossing the lake is not about great, powerful leaders of the world like Ramses the pharaoh, but instead it describes ordinary people, called

by God to greatness. So let's read it as a poem about what life is like for followers of his faith. [read the Luke 8 passage again]

Poetic meaning can be used to find a way through the most challenging times. Yesterday we buried a dear colleague: our pastoral care minister at St Mary's cathedral. [Tennyson poem]

The use of metaphor about a journey is a device used often in poetry.

In my day-job I work as a counsellor. In training we were encouraged to use the metaphor of a journey, to describe what is called "Migration of Identity".

This metaphor describes two places, joined by a wild ocean; and was developed in work with women describing their departure from a violent relationship.

It is of course that universal story of ordinary people escaping something evil and enslaving; and comes directly from the Exodus story; and this essential theme also appears as the disciples find themselves setting out and sailing through a storm.

As those victimized women described leaving the violence, they spoke of entering a place of terrible uncertainty; and finding themselves betwixt and between, often reporting emotional highs and lows, greater than anything they had felt before they escaped the abuse.

Recall, that the people escaping Pharaoh looked back, talking about returning to what they had known rather than face the extraordinary hardships of the desert.

Eventually, as they persevere, a new identity is found along with a new place to be.

The poetic writer of Luke's gospel, in that metaphor of the storm, describes moments of being tossed about and plunging as huge waves threaten to turn the ship back, sometimes sweeping over and even cruelly pulling them back just as they are hopeful of reaching their destination.

This journey through a raging sea can also be used in describing grief, illness, marriage, a career, moving house, parenting and grand-parenting or the new, hugely challenging journey into Climate Change – a storm that appears to have already begun.

In the poem that is Luke chapter 8 [22-28?] all these things are seen in the context of our faith journey. And in each of these journeys we call upon God to guide and reassure us.

Ultimately this scripture is a poem-story about the one, who is with us on our journey as we become someone new and other than we have been, the one who is leading us into wisdom while confounding the rulers of this world, whose imagined power can count for nothing in the end.

And so may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God and the friendship of the Holy Spirit be with us and all those who are dear to us, now and always. Amen.

Kia tau kia tatou katoa, te atawhai of tou tatou Ariki a Ihu Karaiti, me te aroha of te Atua, me te whiwhi tahitanga of te Wairua Tapu, ake, ake, Amine.