

ACTS OF PROTEST; SIGNS OF HOPE

Protests come in many different shapes and sizes. There are protests against cuts to higher education funding, new laws for raw milk, off-shore processing of asylum seekers. There are protests against coal-seam gas, children in detention, the war on terror.

Last Friday I was part of a protest. A group of us stood side-by-side in a church and lit candles with a mother who had lost her daughter to suicide; a brother who had lost a sister, an uncle who had lost a niece, a chaplain who had lost one of his flock.

The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it*

Looking into the eyes of desolation and despair we cried and rallied and protested for a hope that reaches beyond 'the way things are'.

Protests seem to have this in common. They refuse to accept that the way things are, are the way things need to be. Protests enact the holy restlessness that remains hidden, unspoken, neglected like the water table in a desert. But some circumstances make it impossible to remain silent. Sometimes, something must be said. As we prepared our protest, one of the relatives commented that it felt like preparing a wedding. This reminded me that I received the news of the young woman's death just before another protest; a wedding two weeks ago in the Yarra Valley.

Committed, long-term relationships involve a lot of protests (usually about wanting the other person to do something differently!). But in a culture increasingly captive to limiting liability and defining the outer-limits of responsibility, to "I don't" and "I won't", the wedding ceremony stands firm in a spirit of protest and says "I do". A courageous and hope-filled affirmation of life; a commitment to a future unknown, to some mysterious bigger picture that we struggle to reach but which reaches out to us at times of crisis and significance.

In a place of unspeakable pain lighting candles would seem to be a mere drop in the ocean. And yet is the ocean of our lives anything more than single drops of fear and joy and pain and hope?

As the funeral finished and we gathered for refreshments I watched as members of my church came alongside the family and friends, putting themselves in the way of other people's pain; standing in the place where words always fall short and yet standing there anyway; protestors carrying no placards but moving among the crowd acknowledging grief and rallying against despair.

* The Gospel of John 1:5

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