

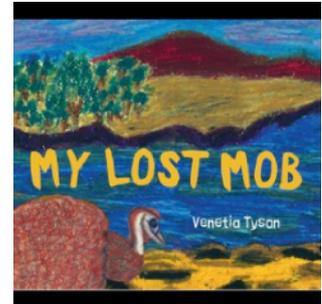
Our Mob

Mark 10:13-16

I'd like to share with you a story that I came across during my holidays. It's a kids' story, and I'll quickly summarise it for you. It's a lovely little book called *My Lost Mob*, by Venetia Tyson, who is a Quandamooka woman of the Noonuccal tribe in the Moreton Bay region of Queensland.

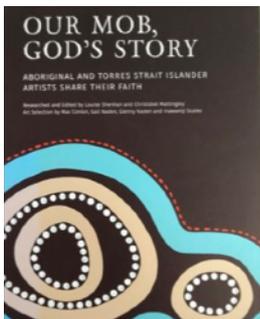


It tells us the story of Emu, who goes looking for his mob; and the book traces Emu as he goes searching, asking people “Where’s my mob? Where’s my mob? Where have they gone?” He goes up the hills and down the hills; he goes to the beach; he goes everywhere, looking for his mob. And finally, he finds them.



Now, when I was a pastor in Alice Springs, it was lovely that often in the church we were referred to as “our mob”. There’s another lovely book, I don’t know if you know it, called *Our Mob: God’s Story*. It’s a

telling of the Scriptures through the work of Aboriginal artists — it’s just a beautiful way to see and hear the Gospel.



So our mob, you and me, are also about to embark on a journey. Our St Paul’s mob, that is. Now, we’re not going to the beach — I’ve already been to the beach, and I strongly recommend it, especially in summer. Nor are we going to the hills. We’re going south together. We’re going to a new church home in Riversdale Road, God willing.

And over these coming Sundays, we’re going to celebrate what it is, what the DNA is, to being St Paul’s Lutheran Church, starting today with God’s work in baptism. Our Sundays will certainly be focusing on God *for* us, God welcoming us, particularly as we hear this in our Gospel reading today.

My question is this: what does this DNA look like? What makes us who we are? If someone was to follow our tracks — spiritually, at heart, what makes St Paul’s Lutheran Church into St Paul’s Lutheran Church?

Well, let’s explore that further. It’s good, I think, that we begin these farewell services by hearing of Jesus’ *welcome*. Jesus *welcomes* children; and today we remember the little ones and the big ones who have been baptised here at Station Street — or before we built this church, in Shadmani, a big old house that used to be just around the corner.

Look at these names on the door, copied from our excellent history of this place! There are many, many reasons to give thanks for God at work in this place as we see that list attached to our doors.

You see, what happens when God's Word and the water come together through the promise of Jesus is just sheer *welcome!* It's gift! It's grace! It's forgiveness, with no questions asked! It's life itself. That's Jesus, who then says as we go, "I am with you always."

Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it." And he took the children, the little ones, up in his arms, laid his hands on them, and blessed them. How many precious little ones, and big ones, are named on our doors today. Are you one of them? [We welcomed people who had been baptised at St Paul's over the decades since the 1950s.]



The same arms that we hear about in our Gospel reading, those same tender, loving arms hold you who are baptised in Jesus, and gently bring sure blessing to you and promise to your life. These are the same arms, by the way, that were violently flung out on a cross at Easter time, for you and for me, for us in this community of Box Hill and beyond, where we are placed. Forgiveness, life! Those same arms are the same arms that were presented to — perhaps disbelieving — disciples following the resurrection of Jesus, bringing peace, bringing eternal life. Those same arms send us, send you and me, not only down the road with blessing, but into our world with a word of life for everyone. You've got it; and Jesus has got you. Because the action at the font will always, and must always, lead to an active life. You know, we often celebrate when someone's baptised — we clap, people go home and have a lovely lunch, we might invite some people around — but you know, we still struggle every day beyond that, don't we? We forget, or something else becomes more important, it seems. And not only do we struggle as we turn from Jesus, but the truth is, if we put our hand on our hearts, that there are also times when we're the ones through our words or actions or lack of them, we're the ones that turn people away from Jesus. And it shouldn't be, should it?

My friends, during these Sundays I'd like to encourage you to see these weeks, as we prepare to move, as moving time for you in your heart — a time of renewal. Run back, as Luther encourages us (he'd say run, as best you can!), back to that baptism, and receive anew the very promise and gift of life for you; because these arms of Jesus that hold you are what make you who you are as a baptised child of God.

The blessing, the welcome, the grace, and the gifts of Jesus in baptism mean that we are no longer the same people; and we have a gift to take wherever we go — to Riversdale Road, a place that will I'm sure be a wonderful, wonderful place for us to worship; but it must always, always be a place of Jesus' welcome, for you, and through you for others.

Who, and where are you called to find people to bring this blessing to? Dear friends in Christ, let's prepare and be renewed by Jesus to be his welcome, his arms of love, and his blessing. "Let the children come to me, and do not stop them," Jesus says, "for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" — as *these*, and to everyone that we are called to go to.

Today we begin our farewell with a word of welcome. Sprinkled; sign of the Cross; Word of life. Go, and make disciples of all nations. Amen.