



**St Peter's Cathedral, North Adelaide  
The Most Reverend Jeffrey Driver  
Archbishop of Adelaide**

**Easter Sermon**

**Sunday 16 April 2006  
10.00 am**

**THE GREAT REVERSAL**

Two stories from Rwanda.

I visited the national genocide memorial in Kigali.  
It is a plain building, not quite as large as this cathedral.  
It is finished with stark simplicity, quite understated.

On every wall there is wide glassed-in shelving,  
and at eye level hundreds of human skulls  
showing the crude marks of slaughter;  
on a level below them there are human femurs,  
and, confrontingly, on a wide lower shelf,  
some of the human effects of those who died:  
the tee shirts and car keys, the pictures of children.

Nearly a million people were killed in one hundred days,  
mostly with machetes, axes and hammers,  
and all this just a little more than a decade ago.

What sort of people could do this?

I have come to know them.  
I count a number of Rwandans as friends: both Hutu and Tutsi.  
As a people they are gentle and warm.  
They are extraordinarily law abiding.  
They have a strong sense of community,  
and although Rwandans are terribly poor by our standards,  
many are quite well educated.

I look forward to seeing some of them in July,  
when a number of young people from this diocese  
join me in a pilgrimage to Africa.

What happened to the people of Rwanda ten years ago?

What happened was that normal peace-loving,  
human beings were caught up in a cycle of vengeance and fear,  
that blew out into a human fission reaction,  
that turned neighbours into machete bearing murderers.

It could equally be Croat and Serb, Arab-Jew, Christian-Moslem, black-white, Sunni and Shia, for this is our world as we know it.

Grief begets grief and what goes 'round comes 'round,  
provocation and response, wheels within wheels,  
and the cycles of aggression and violence roll on without halt or pause.

The Palestinian teenager with bombs strapped to his chest.  
The black American conscript fighting a war he does not understand in Iraq, the suave suited warlords in Washington and the children learning mantras of hate in a fundamentalist school in Asia; they are all part of the same cycle: grief begets grief, violence begets violence and so it continues.

But the story of Jesus Christ and his crucifixion is the great reversal.

*And on a Friday afternoon, after they had stripped him of his dignity, after his friends had forsaken him,  
after the soldiers had spat upon him and whipped him,  
after the trial, when everything was done according to the law,  
they dragged him up a hill, nailed his hands and feet,  
and executed him.  
And as he hung there bleeding to death, he cried out: "Father, forgive"*

Aggression met with forgiveness,  
Violence borne without revenge.  
Suffering absorbed in vulnerability and self-giving.

This is the great Easter reversal.  
Easter tells us that peace comes when the cycle of violence is broken.  
Peace is secured when acts of aggression are turned by heroic sacrifice.  
True peace is given to others, not won from others.

As Hans Kung (*On Being a Christian*) put it:  
*Love of enemies instead of their destruction,  
Unconditional forgiveness instead of retaliation;  
Readiness to suffer instead of using force; Blessing for peace-makers instead  
of hymns of hate and revenge.*

This is the Easter reversal, power through powerlessness,  
healing through suffering, victory through what looks like defeat.

Another story from Rwanda.  
Wim is a doctor at the Gahini Hospital.

He had come to this bush hospital briefly,  
soon after the genocide in Rwanda in 1995  
and his heart was moved by what he saw,  
and by a sense of call from God to bring his gifts and care  
to the overwhelming needs he saw before him.

He applied to a number of Church mission agencies,  
but the wheels of Church bureaucracy turn slowly  
and impatient with waiting,  
he packed up his Landrover and drove from his home in Capetown,  
through the nations of southern and central Africa and came to Gahini,  
where he supported himself, and gave himself,  
and went to work in appalling conditions to bring healing to broken bodies,  
and a word of faith to shattered lives.

Last year I was in the hospital with Wim

Faced with the needs of Africa, he had learnt to do eye surgery.  
We went to a ward to see three of his patients.  
There were two children. A girl of about six.  
A boy a little older. Both blind from birth.  
A mother probably nearing 30, also blind from birth.

Wim had operated just few days earlier.  
The bandages had been removed the day before.  
He went to the girl first and held her eyelid open and tested her eyes,  
and with still a flicker the little girl's eyes followed his hand,  
as he moved it before her.

Then he produced a colourful knitted doll,  
that I had brought with me from Australia,  
and this child that had been blind from birth,  
broke into the broadest African smile.

*Then suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel from heaven came  
and rolled back the stone and proclaimed, "He is Risen!"*

Did I not hear the echo of the stone rolled back, that morning in Rwanda,  
when two children and a mother born blind opened their eyes and saw?  
Did I not hear the grinding of the stone being rolled away from the tomb?

They came early, the two Marys, the Magdalene and the other;  
they came following a black night of grief and despair.  
came to weep and love and attend their friend,  
with burial things and shattered hopes they came,  
to bring the body of Jesus the dignity of herbs and spices,  
for this was the custom in burying the dead.

And in their grief and emptiness that morning, they came to the tomb....

*Then suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel from heaven came  
and rolled back the stone and proclaimed, "He is Risen!"*

And the emptiness of the tomb was filled with life;  
grief became joy and the empty space was filled with hope.

Here is the great Easter reversal:  
death and greyness and the empty places,  
filled with life and newness and hope!

For while Easter is an event once and for all,  
it also interprets life as it is today.

"Christ is your life", the writer to the Colossians said:  
Easter is life! Easter is now!  
Easter is the great reversal!

So whenever people have stood at the tomb of their grief,  
and resolved in faith to live again;  
whenever people have risen to give themselves through sacrifice and love,  
making a difference to the world, bringing life to others,  
then can you not hear the grinding echo of the stone being rolled away from the  
tomb?

*Then suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel from heaven came  
and rolled back the stone ...."*

And whenever people who have experienced crippling disability or tragedy and  
refused to accept defeat, whenever people have stood at the tomb  
of their hopes and refused to give in; and whenever individuals are compelled to  
great and selfless acts and emerge with optimism and faith to make a new beginning,

And whenever we find people who have experienced the death of relationship and  
have struggled and have built life again,  
then can you not hear the grinding of that stone?  
Can you not hear the echo?

*Then suddenly there was a great earthquake; for an angel from heaven came  
and rolled back the stone....*

Do you not hear the echo of that stone rolling back?

Here is the great reversal of Easter,  
and here is the new life of Easter Day,  
which is not just as past to remember,  
or future to hope for,  
but the experience of a living Christ,  
who is found in the dark places  
and transforms our grey morning of deadness,  
with the possibility and power of life renewed.  
Easter is life! Easter is now!  
Easter is the great reversal!