

Good morning, for those who I haven't yet met, my name is Felicity. My husband Sam and I have recently moved to Mobile to join the L'Arche community here. Many of you will know that L'Arche Mobile is part of a worldwide federation of communities made up of adults with and without intellectual disabilities sharing life together in mutual relationships. Those who are differently abled, we call core members, because they are at the very heart of all L'Arche communities.

One week into arriving in Mobile back in November, we were whisked off along with the entire Mobile community to Atlanta Georgia, for a gathering of L'Arche communities from the Southeast of the US.

Each team member was paired with a core member, the idea being that we were to look out for each other during our time there. One week in, and feeling frankly inadequate in the face of complex morning and evening routines, I was beginning to wonder what we'd got ourselves into. So it was with some trepidation that I stepped onto the bus to Atlanta to look for my partner, Annie Pearl.

Annie Pearl, as it turns out, is the kind of person who you hear before you see - not only because she's under 5 foot tall, but because she'll shout a loud word of welcome to everyone who crosses her path. Ready or not, she runs across the room to greet you and take you by the hand, smiling from ear to ear.

When I finally found Annie Pearl towards the middle of the bus, she patted the seat next to hers, before saying something that she was to repeat often to me on that trip, 'Jesus loves me'.

Henri Nouwen, a theologian of L'Arche talks about how the essential cry of the human heart is: do you love? In my peculiar mixture of light and shadow, with my dreams and my failures, do you love me? Simply as I am?

Somehow Annie Pearl's gentleness and absolute confidence in her own belovedness, stilled my anxious heart on that trip. As she said again and again 'Jesus loves me', she helped me *remember* who I was, that I too was beloved.

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Around 500 years before Christ, a prophet cries out to an anxious people that they might *remember* who they are. Israel has returned to Jerusalem, and is faced with the daunting task of rebuilding their city after the devastation of exile.

The people are fighting over who should rule, with different factions clutching for power. Insecurity and uncertainty around what the future holds has ultimately led Israel to forget who they are.

Israel's rituals and religious fasting, which were always supposed to bring about God's righteousness and justice, have turned instead into the pointing of fingers and oppression of the poor.

And so it's into the midst of this self-forgetfulness, that Isaiah calls Israel back to remember themselves as God's beloved.

A people whose confidence in their belovedness should *always* overflow into the business of setting people free, of bringing God's generous love and compassion to the poor and oppressed. Of being a light to the nations.

A few hundred years later, Christ stands in front of a sick,  
broken, differently abled and hurting people and reminds them of  
their belovedness. He blesses them and then he says to the  
broken ones of God ‘you are the salt of the earth, you are the  
light of the world.’

He doesn’t offer them advice, or instruction on what to do to  
become salt and light. He simply proclaims it as truth.

Salt. And light. Two basic but precious commodities  
in 1<sup>st</sup> century Palestine.

It’s like Jesus is saying to the physically broken, to  
the emotionally and spiritually weighed down  
‘remember who you are ... you are of this earth – the  
saltiness of your blood, sweat and tears are reminders  
that you infinitely precious to God, the one who  
moulded you from this dusty earth. And although  
today you may be full of cracks, through them shines  
the most precious of lights.’

*You are the salt of the earth, you are the light  
with which I plan to light up the whole world.*

Jesus invites the crowd in front of him into an act of holy  
remembrance.

Every true and significant moment in Scripture and in sacramental church life is about remembering. A sacred re-piecing of our belovedness so that we realise who we are.

You see what Jesus understands as did the prophets before him, is that embracing our belovedness isn't a flowery, feel good gesture, it is a radical, prophetic act.

Jesus calls us to remember who we are. For if we claim that belovedness is the birthright and true identity of every being, we soon realise that I can't name my own belovedness, without in turn naming even my worst enemy's. Like salt we draw out the true nature of those around us, like light we illuminate darkness and reveal beauty.

Recognising our own preciousness is a radical political statement in a world that often forgets who we are and which entraps us into a web of labels, stereotypes and false assumptions. When we fall for its lies, we too can forget who we are. Absorbed with a false image of ourselves, we indulge in noble sentiments, but remain silent or passive in the face of oppressive and unjust systems to which we are inextricably linked. We forget our preciousness and instead strive for a perfection that is never attainable.

Perhaps you like me need to be re-membered. To let the simple, provocative message of the prophet from Nazareth remind you of who you really are. Of an identity which goes deeper than your best or your worst days. That lies beyond your ego and pretense, within the hidden secret of who you are.

Which brings me back to Annie Pearl. Being an African American woman in her 70s with an intellectual disability, our hypercognitive, overproductive and scapegoating culture has all too often silenced her voice, her rights and her gifts.

But each day as Annie Pearl re-members and names her belovedness, she re-tells the true story according to the light of God's truth - one that directly subverts the story of domination and oppression and the prevailing myths around her personhood.

'Jesus loves me' Annie Pearl says. And so she stands in the tradition of the prophets from the margins who speak to the depths of our human experience to remind us - you and me - who we are.

'Jesus loves me' Annie Pearl says. Annie Pearl speaks a truth as real and precious as any from the saints and theologians of our history. And she invites us to make those words our words.