



## **Service of Solemn Prayer for those affected**

### **by the tragedy at Bondi Junction**

#### **St Andrew's Cathedral**

**April 16, 2024**

#### **Sermon by Archbishop Kanishka Raffel**

#### **John 9:1-11**

Jesus says, While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.

In John's gospel much is said about the light.

In chapter 1:5 John says, the light shines in the darkness and the darkness has not overcome it.

Jesus, the light of the world overcomes the darkness in the world.

That is the Christian hope and the message we proclaim.

Light wins. The light of Jesus wins.

Sydney is in shock and grief. We have been rocked in a way that we have not experienced for many years. Tonight, we pause to mourn with those who grieve the loss of Yixuan Cheng, Pikria Darchia, Ashlee Good, Dawn Singleton, Faraz Tahir, and Jade Young.

We cannot imagine the grief, disbelief and agonising sorrow of those who have lost the ones they loved. We express our sympathy and gather in respectful tribute.

Some of you knew these people. They were colleagues, friends and relatives. They had gifts and talents, their own stories, hopes and dreams for the future.

But whether we knew them or not, we have all been affected because they were engaged in the most unremarkable of weekend activities, activities common to us all.

A sunny Saturday afternoon in a place that is so familiar to the locals, in a suburb known around the world. The ordinary pleasures of a Sydney weekend in autumn - leisure, friendship, family, shopping, conversation, entertainment.

Suddenly, horrifically, incomprehensibly disrupted and disfigured by random violence, cruel attack, deadly assault.

Why should they suffer in this way? It is just the question that Jesus is asked about the man born blind. Was it his parents who sinned or was it him? Jesus says it was neither. Jesus doesn't subscribe to a folk concept of karma. Jesus liberates us from thinking that the sorrows and hardships we encounter are punishment for past sins or unknown sins.

And yet, there is darkness in the world. Part of the evil of evil is its meaninglessness, its purposelessness, its irrationality. God is the God of order. Disorder belongs to the realm of evil.

There are sorrows so inexplicable, cruel and meaningless that we can hardly breathe and hardly bear it. Many of us who did not know personally those who were killed this weekend, nevertheless have found ourselves in tears in recent days, because our common humanity binds us to them in ways that we don't often acknowledge but which emerge spontaneously, insistently, in the face of such evil.

And so we remember too the family of the attacker. They too are in deep distress over what has taken place.

Jesus teaches us that there is a solidarity in sorrow. While some seek to blame the blind man for his pitiable condition Jesus reaches out to him. Jesus touches him and Jesus heals him. The gospels record that Jesus was a healer. Often with just a word. But John records here that Jesus is very deliberate in the healing of this man. He gathers some dirt and spits into it to make a paste, he rubs it together and then presses it on the man's eyes, he tells him to go and wash.

What is happening here? Jesus' disciples ask him about the man. But they do not speak to the man, though he is right there in front of them. They speak about him, as though he were not there. As though he were deaf as well as blind. But Jesus includes him. Embraces him. Touches him – the blind man was a social and religious outcast. But Jesus values and affirms his humanity before he heals him.

This seems so natural and right to us, but it is so only because Jesus initiated two thousand years of the practice of solidarity and compassion rather than distancing ourselves from the suffering of others. He has taught the world not to stand far off from those in pain and grief, but to stand alongside, and offer a steadying hand.

Jesus describes what he is doing this way. 'As long as it is day, we must do the works of him who sent me. Night is coming when no one can work. While I am in the world, I am the light of the world.'

Jesus is doing the works of God. And he says, his followers must do the same. The works of light. The first chapter of the bible records the first words of God in the bible – let there be light. Light that drives away the darkness. Light that brings order to the chaos. Light that gives life to the world. The works of God, the works of light.

As so many have observed, even in the midst of the shadow that was cast over Westfield Bondi Junction on Saturday afternoon, yet there were those who pursued the works of light.

Faraz Tahir who died in the course of protecting others. The two brothers who cared for Ashlee Good's baby child. Damien Guerot aka 'Bollard man', who opposed the assailant to his face. Those who refused to leave but sought to assist others to leave safely. Works of light in the midst of darkness.

First responders – police, emergency, fire and ambulance personnel. Bravely, sacrificially putting themselves in harm's way as they do every single day. Dealing with people in need, people in confusion and fear and distress with calm, patience and compassion. Emergency medical personnel who assess and treat the injured as they arrive at hospitals distributed across the city. The ICU nurses and doctors maintaining 24-hour care, including for the injured baby girl, for whom so many continue to pray. Works of light for which we thank God, and salute those who serve the community in this way.

And NSW Police Inspector Amy Scott who saved the lives of who knows how many more by confronting and disarming the assailant, while under attack herself, and then administering CPR in an ultimately unsuccessful attempt to preserve his life as well. Works of light.

And in the aftermath, such works continue and will do so. Chaplains, churches, psychologists, parents seeking to assure, to calm, to enable others to process what has happened and to resolve to go on in hope and trust.

We have just celebrated Easter. In our reading, Jesus says 'the night is coming.' He was referring to the terrible day of darkness when Jesus died upon a cross, innocent of crime, falsely accused and corruptly condemned. And yet, for Christians, Good Friday, because on the cross he bore the weight of the world's sin, so that we might be freed from the penalty our sins deserved and experience forgiveness, welcome and a sure hope in God. And the day of glorious breaking light – Easter Day, when the light of the world triumphed over the darkness of sin and death, opening the door to life with God now and eternally.

On the Cross, Jesus did the works of light which no one else could do to secure our hope in the face of death and to herald the dawn of the eternal day when there is no night, and there will be no more war or pain or crying, and every tear will be wiped away.

In a world still under the shadow of death, the Cross and the empty tomb of Jesus assure us that we are not alone, and we are loved. In times like these we gather, we offer one another comfort and compassion, we seek to do the works of light that are in our power to do, and to resist the works of darkness. And we pray that God would turn our hearts, and open our eyes, to see in his Son the Lord Jesus Christ, the light of the world who overcomes the darkness.