

Risen – we are Mercy people, alleluia our song

Nga mihi atawhai - greetings to all in Mercy! Due for general release later this month is an intriguing film, *Risen*, which focuses on the time between Jesus' crucifixion and the emergence of communities that believed he was still with them. Joseph Fiennes has the lead role of Clavius, a Roman tribune tasked with tracking down the body of Jesus after rumours spread that he had come back to life.

Across the array of modern biblical epics this story is unique, in that it is told through the eyes of a non-believer. His own scepticism about Christ is challenged as he encounters the apostles and other historical characters. On our own journey towards Easter in this Year of Mercy, it is worth asking if there are links between *Risen* and our involvement in one Mercy ministry or another. If Clavius came looking for signs of mercy in what we do, would there be enough evidence to convict us?

It seems important to recall that each of our ministries was established by Sisters of Mercy, founded as an expression of their faith in a Lord who died and rose, and who asked that he be served in the needs of others. "In so far as you did it to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me."

Today, many of those same ministries to the sick and the dying, the poor and vulnerable, the young and unlearned, are in the hands of people who are not Sisters but who have been entrusted by them to extend in the name of Mercy the same kind of care. What kind of faith does it take for this to happen? Clearly, we are not vowed to community as religious; some of us may not be Catholics, or even Christians. But we are asked to believe that, like Catherine McAuley, we can make a difference to someone else whose life is enriched because we have touched it in some real way.

And the truth is, we cannot give what we do not have. Or, as Nigerian-born British poet Ben Okri writes, 'you cannot remake the world without remaking yourself.' Which is why the Lenten journey each year hopes to find us better equipped for mission at its end than when we first set out.

A Mercy ministry is more than a job. It is a calling, a way of being, in which we are able to bring to what we do each day the best we have to offer. Typically, a ministry is some-

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RISEN: Joseph Fiennes stars as Roman tribune Clavius.

thing we could never do single-handed. As Catherine recalled, the work of the Sisters of Mercy "began with two of us," and team-work, a ministry that flows from a vision we share with colleagues and associates, is still the recipe for Mercy's success.

Good governance is critical to setting a course for Mercy: it helps to authenticate the path we take, within a framework that is unmistakably the kind that Catherine and her pioneer sisters would have endorsed had they been in our shoes now. Governance also ensures that we have the resources and the strategies we need in order to succeed, and that behind the vision is faith in a providential God who promises to bless and prosper what is done in a spirit of trust and hope.

In the movie *Risen*, our non-believing hero surprises himself by what he finds – not the body he seeks, but a mysterious belief in an unseen presence. Mission is like that – unseen, intangible, but an essential ingredient if the work is to flourish. At their last Chapter, our sisters committed themselves to the process of whakawhanaungatanga – of making right relationships happen. Part of that involves widening Mercy's circles – which is why so many of us who are not sisters now feel that we belong and have a stake in what happens within Mercy. Through their hospitality, we have been made to feel at home.

Three other key strands are named in that [2014 Chapter Statement](#): to stand with fragile communities, to be disturbed into action, and to embrace cultural diversity. The image adopted by the sisters includes three unfolding spirals representing the communities of Aotearoa New Zealand, Tonga and Samoa, woven in a pattern that speaks of the value of manaakitanga hospitality that is common to the three Pacific nations, "and all is held in the colours of the ocean that surrounds and connects our island nations."

If Clavius were to ask us where all this comes from, we could answer with the phrase that also appears in the Chapter statement – Atawhai atu, Atawhai mai – Mercy given and received. We are no more or less than what God's free gift has made us. Search for the body, and there is none to be found. But, as St Augustine famously declared, we are Easter people, and *Alleluia* is our song.

- Dennis Horton

*E Te Atua Kaiwetewete –
God, you come to liberate and set free.
Come with new grace this Easter
empowering us to stand more strongly
with those who are fragile and broken.
Disturb us by what we see
into action for mercy.
Let us see how our lives are rich
by the mercy we have received,
that we might share it more
with all who have less.
Atawhai atu, atawhai mai,
in Mercy's name. Alleluia!*