EASTER 6B 2012 (read only)

Some visitors to my house this week spotted the model of Noah’s ark that resides in the display cabinet in my front room. They spotted too that when you wind up the key you hear the tune from the story of Dr Doolittle – who, as the story goes, had the gift of being able to talk to the animals.

So let me tell you of a real life story that took place at Cape Cod in the USA, where one day a man called Nate Sears spotted three pilot whales making a life threatening surge for the beach. Instinctively he went to their aid, not having a clue whether he could actually do anything to help them. Still relying on instinct he found himself responding to the first distressed whale by simply placing his hands on its back in a spontaneous gesture of reassurance. To his amazement the whale stopped its thrashing and eventually responded to the gentle urge of his touch redirected itself back to the ocean. Thankfully its two companions responded in the same way.

This heartening story shows how the gift of sincere and caring touch allowed the whales to trust and respond to the offered help; then by changing direction they lived on.

It is a wonderful tale of how a spontaneous act of human kindness initiated an almost mystical encounter with the animal kingdom.

Environmentalists and animal lovers are often and sometimes justifiably accused of being too sentimental. And indeed the created order has an inbuilt cruel necessity that requires predatory species to survive only at the expense of their prey.

Humanity has one foot in this cruel kingdom; but I think we retain one foot in Eden. Our own survival needs need not be met at the expense of our capacity to understand, care for, nurture and protect the natural world.

A more subtle reading of the Genesis account of creation reminds us that we are stewards and not masters of our environment. Our primary task is to protect ourselves by protecting and not exploiting the ecosystem.

When we hear Jesus say that he chooses to call us friends and not servants – he is surely reminding us that for all of his transcendence and majesty, God has chosen to be part of our lives. Jesus lives this out by sitting at table, tending our wounds, dispelling our shame, washing our feet and sharing our tears. He seals this love by giving his life for us, his friends.

By force of instinctive compassion Nat Sears responded to three distressed and imperilled whales. Through him the power of gentleness saved their lives.

When we allow ourselves to be befriended by Christ we too find ourselves calmed, reassured, re-directed and rescued from ultimate harm.