

**Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2018**

**ChCh-St. Luke's**

**Readings:**

2 Samuel 5:1-10

Ps. 48

(2Cor.12:2-10)

Mark 6:1-13

**Reflection:**

A few years ago, when heading across the Tasman to Sydney for a weekend course, I made a rather courageous choice to travel light! It was a challenging decision – especially as I didn't know much about where I was staying, or the expectations of the course and its social requirements. I had no idea whether the 'social function' advertised as part of the course, was a dress-up affair or not! But I stuck with the decision to take only hand luggage – no spare items of any description. And I survived (!) - not even wearing everything I had packed! There was a great sense of freedom in traveling light (not to mention a short trip through airport security)... a great sense of freedom in being uncluttered. The lack of physical luggage also seemed to trigger a mental decluttering, somehow freeing the mind and opening me to encountering others with more simplicity and honesty. Although, in a sense I was more vulnerable in this new situation, I also felt more authentic and grounded.

Jesus sent his disciples out into new territory, encouraging them to travel light. What was he asking of them? What did *they* need to set aside? What was important to take with them? It would seem that Jesus gave the twelve 'authority' to bring healing and wholeness to those who would welcome them. These ordinary, untrained men were given a mandate, mastery, power to initiate the extraordinary in others, calling those they encountered to 'repent' – to turn away from all that was life-denying and seek fullness of life, What an extraordinary mission.

In Jesus' own neighbourhood, the people refused to receive anything extraordinary from the one *they* could only perceive as ordinary – one of their own. How could this Nazarean

artisan, son of Mary (not son of Joseph, you note), brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon and his sisters – how could this local man teach with such wisdom and do deeds of power? Their questioning is understandable. Aren't we much the same? Often struggling to accept any newly acquired authority in those close to us? It's something of a kiwi characteristic. Whether at personal, community or national level, we often find it easier to accept or acknowledge the expert 'from a far land' rather than welcome a 'prophet in our midst'.

As Jesus returns to Nazareth in today's Gospel, some of his own people - even while acknowledging in amazement his wisdom and power - take offense at him. This is a prophet's lot, Jesus acknowledges. And he does few acts of healing in his home town. Expertise is most respected when it comes from a distance. This is a provocative story because it implies that healing is contextual and that even God must adapt to our current life situation. There is no supernaturalism here; no violations of cause and effect interdependence; rather a revelation that God's immanence in the world is concrete and contextual. Despite his healing powers, Jesus is limited by concrete expressions of unbelief.

Prophetic gifts as well. Prophets are best when they are far away and long ago. Here and now is a different story. "Surely she cannot be a prophet. I went to school with her." "He cannot prophesy; I know his mother."

Like the prophets before him, Jesus performed prophetic symbolic actions - in his table fellowship with outcasts, his choice of a donkey to enter Jerusalem, his clearing of the Temple area, his washing of feet.

Jesus was quick to acknowledge his own villagers' critiques in the synagogue that Sabbath, but his response was simply to continue his mission – to teach among the villages and to send out the very ordinary twelve 'travelling light', (with no bread, no bag, no money in their belts) - encouraging and empowering them to do the extraordinary in the midst of those who would receive them.

Jesus sends the disciples out. But they're amateurs. Peter has not yet said, "You are the Messiah." They have not yet experienced the Lord's supper, or the crucifixion, or witnessed the resurrection. They have not yet been anointed by the Holy Spirit.

But Jesus sends them, to learn by doing ...and by failing.

We are amateur human beings. We bumble along generation by generation and sometimes stumble into our fuller humanity. Not by being safe. Not by cluttering our lives with buffer zones of distraction and comfort. But by trying to emulate the one who gave his life in compassion.

Wasn't this lived out in our communities after the earthquakes? Don't we see it in action at the Tham Luang cave complex in Thailand? And in the fire-fighting teams in California or any number of other selfless and courageous responses to pain and suffering in our world and God's creation.

As one commentator has stated: 'We may one day find ourselves unleashed, our hearts emboldened, our words firm and free. We reject not only the prophets around us. We reject the prophet within. This is the repression of the prophetic and heroic impulse of that person who is most ordinary and familiar to us: one's very self.'

The reason we reject our own heroic and prophetic possibilities, if we are honest with ourselves, is that we know how weak and inadequate we are. Surely a hero cannot be lurking behind such common talent, such ordinary appearance. Surely a prophet's life is not marked by failures and frailties such as ours.

And – here's the catch – the Creator of the Universe chooses us to be His people, sending us into a world unarmed, scarcely ready, flawed, dependent. Loved for what we were created to be, not for what we do, we have no idea what we're getting into. In short, we are the wrong people for the job. It's God, not we and certainly not our accomplishments, who makes us the right people.

So what is Jesus asking of us? What might we need to set aside? What is important to take with us?

Perhaps today, we are called – as rather ordinary followers of Jesus – to do the extraordinary in the midst of those who receive us – to reach out in Christian love, to be peace-makers in our homes, to speak out against injustice and to open our hearts and minds to the extraordinary gifts of love, acceptance, forgiveness and healing, offered by the ordinary folk in our lives!

*'Come to the edge, he said.*

*They said, We are afraid.*

*Come to the edge, he said.*

*They came.*

*He pushed them...*

*And they flew'. -Peter McWilliams 1949-2000*

*Let us pray,*

Compassionate God

Create in us a deeper sense of your love for this world

Encourage us to be courageous in our actions

Wise in our speaking,

Generous in our sharing

And hopeful in our living

That we may build communities of compassion

And grace.

This we pray through Christ Jesus,

Our prophet, priest and king. Amen.