

## SERMON FOR SUNDAY 13C

### All Saints Birkenhead

Before the arrival of Covid as a congregation we loved to travel. You could say that as a country we love to travel. Flights have resumed and seem to be full as people make their journeys around the world. Of course for us travel is always an event because of the distance we are from anywhere else. Even within NZ travel is an event because there is always a range of mountains to cross to get to any city. Travel is big business in this country.

It's interesting that the portion of Luke's Gospel we read is the beginning of a section known as The Travel Narrative. It continues up to Chapter 19 v 27. The beginning says "When the days drew near for him to be taken up, Jesus set his face to go to Jerusalem." The author of the Gospel is reminding us about what was facing Jesus in his future. The author is also reminding us that we are on the journey to the heavenly Jerusalem.

2

The hard bit is that whatever journey we are on to be a follower of Jesus on a journey will require

some radical readjustments to our way of looking at life. It will require some new ways of living.

We have a tendency to forget that life has always forced us to new ways of seeing things simply because of what has happened to us. Sometimes what happens is asked for, sometimes it comes at us unasked and unwanted. But all that happens forces change upon us.

Looking into the future of this parish we are going to have to change the way we look at Church life. And in order to do that, we must also look back at the story of this church and how it came to be. This process is a reminder that we have to keep going back to the beginning of our journeys and recall how it came about. The story needs continual retelling, just as the story of Jesus needs continual retelling.

3

So what is it that Jesus demands in the way of new thinking and acting on our journey.

I think it is important to understand how Jesus used language in his day. We often take Jesus' words very seriously and literally, though he didn't

always do so. For instance, have you ever said to someone “there were hundreds of people present” when what you really meant was “There were a lot of people present”. Or have you said “over my dead body” but hadn’t the remotest thought of dying. We use such phrases in order to stress the seriousness of what we are saying. We exaggerate to make sure our point is heard. We don’t want people to take us literally. I believe Jesus did exactly the same. The portion of the Gospel we read is a good example of Jesus using exaggerated language. He wants his followers to know what’s really important. Because we can become dulled to the message, he uses this extreme way of reminding us what life’s journey in really about.

4

We may react against such language because it brings us face to face with the realities of life, and we may not like what we hear.

So what is Jesus saying to his followers as we travel on life’s journey?

First he tells us something about violence. I have to be honest and say that there have been times when I would like to have called down fire to destroy

someone. It hasn’t worked though. James and John actually asked Jesus if he would do it for them. This Samaritan village didn’t welcome them so they need to be destroyed. But Jesus rebukes them. This is not the time for judgment on those who reject Jesus. He knows that later the Samaritans will become a place for mission, the place where the love of God is proclaimed. Mostly we don’t want to carry out that sort of violence on people we dislike. We are more subtle about it. The violence we use is to treat people as less than human. Maybe just ignoring people is a form of violence too.

5

Violence to others can happen so quickly and easily in these very subtle ways, which may not be as subtle as we think. We even do violence to ourselves when we treat ourselves as less than human; when we forgot that we are creatures of God. The hard part of this lesson from Jesus is that when we see those we want to do violence to, we need to remind ourselves that our real desire should be for mission. Treat these people to an example of the love, acceptance, and grace of God. Let them see that reconciliation to God and one another is more important to us than violence of any sort.

Then there's the poor man who made a bold statement "I will follow you wherever you go." Jesus response, "But the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head" is a reminder that if we follow the way of Jesus we cannot expect security. I suspect the man in the gospel went off dejected. Who would want to follow when the cost may be so high? I think Jesus is not just talking about physical comforts here.

6

What he is saying is that we will have to learn to put our trust in a person for security, not just in our possessions. The question for us is "Where do we find real security for our life's journey?" I don't know any easy answer to this question. To simply say "In God" isn't enough for me. God needs to have some human expression. For me the answer probably lies in community; in being with people. Each of us has to struggle to find the real security we need for our life's journey.

Jesus seems to strike right at the heart of family duty and affection. "Let the dead bury their own dead" and "No one who puts a hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God". Most communities see it as a primary duty to bury the

dead, and especially those of one's own family. Saying goodbye to those at home seems a reasonable request. Yet Jesus seems to question family loyalty.

7

If we take these sayings with others Jesus made about family, we can see that Jesus is suggesting we may need to think more widely in terms of family. In another place he said "My family are those who hear the word of God and do it". Perhaps our limited way of thinking of family needs some reassessment if we are to follow Jesus. Our so called blood relationships may be too restrictive if we are to follow the life journey Jesus asks of us. I think we are being asked to accept others just as we accept those who we usually call family.

It seems as if Jesus is asking us to make some radical reassessments about our lives if we are his followers. He is asking us to be loving and accepting people, to place our trust in him and not material things, to be people of community and include others as if they were our own family. By using some exaggerated language Jesus wants to

jolt us out of our complacency and think about what following him really means.

8

Our choices are often not between good and evil, but rather between what is good and what is best. This is a far more difficult choice to make. Jesus always wants the best for us even when we are stuck in what we think is good. Jesus is continually asking us to be aware of things which may be good in themselves, but may in fact be keeping us from travelling with him on life's journey.

As we come to grips with the challenge of Jesus' words we all realise that we the baptized have a ministry to perform. The gospel makes it clear. Some will be leaders of us so that we may know better how to minister to God's work in the world. Some will use their influence in the world to bring about the mission of God. Whatever the path, Jesus empowers us through community, through love, through prayer and through the Eucharist.

Let us pray

Enlighten our hearts and minds, O God, through the power of your Spirit that we may discern where you are calling us. Give us courage, hope and vision that

we may know your will and have the strength to do it. This we ask through Christ our Lord. AMEN.