

**02 JANUARY 2025   A Reflection   Rev Wayne Toleafoa**

**Readings: Jeremiah 1:4-10; 1 Corinthians 13:1-13; Luke 4:21-30**

## **OUR CALLING**

Sometimes it's very difficult to see a common theme in the chosen Lectionary readings that we use each Sunday.

We use the Revised Common Lectionary (RCL). A selection of readings which cover most of the major biblical themes and stories, over a three-year period.

In the Gospel readings for each Sunday, we basically follow the life of Jesus from his birth through to his death and resurrection. Every year, we get to meet Jesus again as we follow his Story.

Last week we heard the first part of the story of Jesus' homecoming to Nazareth where he chose three verses from Isaiah, and made them his manifesto: *Isaiah 61: 1-3*

*'The spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord has anointed me; he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and release to the prisoners; 2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour'.*

He finished the reading by saying , "Today this prophecy is being fulfilled as you listen".

Another way of saying that is :

'This is my calling!

'This prophecy is what I am doing! This is what I will do!

I will bring Good News to the oppressed...

I will bind up the broken-hearted...

I will proclaim liberty to the captives...

I will release those who are in prisons of all kinds...

And I am proclaiming that God's grace /favour is now here.

What Isaiah prophesied; 'I am doing and will do!'

'This is my calling!'

That is good news to people who are feeling oppressed, good news to the dispossessed, the refugees, good news to the poor of this world, good news to people who feel imprisoned by their circumstances. Good news to people who cannot see the goodness in life. Good news to people like you and me with our daily struggles.

In this week's reading, we heard how Jesus' visit to his hometown ended badly.

Old friends and neighbours took offence at what he said. He suggested that pagans had more faith than God's own people.

They dragged him to a cliff outside the town and wanted to toss him over. But somehow, he was able to escape unhurt. 'His time had not yet come'.

**This week, I'm going to go with the theme of, 'God's Calling' which is a common thread in all the readings that we heard today.**

The word, 'Vocation' is the word we use these days for 'calling'. We talk about finding a calling or a vocation in life.

Over the years, I've been involved in the selection and interviews of several people for what I regard as important positions: Chaplains to the Forces, civilians working for chaplaincy departments and I've even been involved in the selection process for a new school principal.

I have also been interviewed by several selection committees including the one that recommended me for my present position as your minister.

I don't know if you're regretting that now. I have certainly enjoyed being your minister for the last 5 years.

These days, the employment selection processes (inside and outside the church) are often guided by an organisational psychologist, who is also an HR / Human Resources 'expert'.

Through a series of rigorous tests, the psychologist can advise the selection committee about things like the 'personality type' of the candidate. Are they a loner? Or a team person? An extrovert? Or an introvert? How do they handle conflict and difficult relationships?

Are they self-motivated? What are their reasoning skills like? Are they critical thinkers?

What kind of a 'fit' is the candidate, for the job they've applied for?

When I applied for the ministry over 40 years ago, it was quite a progressive process.

We were checked out by a psychologist to see if we're nuts or not. I managed to duck under the radar for that. We had medical tests, including X Rays (if I recall). We were interviewed by several committees from Presbytery, and the national church and finally the staff of Knox Theological Hall.

We also spent a few days of 'discerning our call' at Knox College. I can recall all of us new candidates gathered in a room and asked the question, 'What led you to apply for the ministry?'

I remember one candidate telling us about his 'call'.

He said he was not as involved in the church as his wife. But one day he came to church with his wife and the Moderator of General Assembly preached that Sunday. After hearing the Moderator's sermon, he thought, 'I can do better than that!' So he applied for the ministry.

There's more to the story than that, I discovered, as I got to know him, over time. He also came from a family of ministers. His father and grandfather were also ministers, but he had a great sense of humour, as you've heard.

Another candidate talked about feeling a burning in his heart as he thought of serving as a minister.

There were as many reasons, as there were candidates in the room.

Most of us candidates got through to the next stage. A few did not.

Others were told to go away and give it more thought. Or to do another course of study. It was a weekend of joy and disappointment.

**Today, when a young person sets out to fulfill their calling, or their vocation, I guess they must find a job that suits their gifting and their skills (or potential skills). If they want to be happy throughout their working life.**

**Our first reading today was about a young man who felt himself being called to be a prophet – a job he did not feel he could fulfill because he was 'too young'.**

According to the story, God saw something in Jeremiah that he could not see in himself. God believed in him, more than he believed in himself.

Jeremiah fulfilled the requirements of a good prophet. He was a visionary. He loved God and people. He believed in the justice described in Hosea and other prophets before him. He had a healthy dose of humility. He aligned with God more than he did with the priests and rulers of his time. He was a critical thinker and could think 'outside the box' to see the new things that God was doing in Israel & Judah's complicated situation.

Israel & Judah are the heroes from our point of view, but in the larger picture of the Middle East, during Jeremiah's time, Israel and Judah were minor vassal states, at the mercy of Babylon and Egypt.

Jeremiah prophesied into that complex political situation. His popularity waxed and waned. He was seen as a traitor at one moment and a hero the next.

**Rev Dr Doug Gay from Trinity College, Edinburgh, summarizes three movements in Jeremiah's calling which we can probably align with our own sense of vocation.**

1. **God's call** – the sense that this is what my life is for.

2. **Jeremiah's reluctance** – We look for excuses when we see a worthy challenge in front of us. I know I do. I'm a great procrastinator. I know I need to do something and 'do it the Samoan way' - tomorrow.

Jeremiah felt that his age was a handicap, even though he came from a priestly family, with a tradition of public service.

I guess many of us, at the 'sharp end' of life - over 50 - might also consider age to be a handicap when we think of doing something major.

3. **God equipped Jeremiah.** Gave him the skills he will need. Activated the skills he already had, inherited from his family, and his educational and religious background.

God will also equip us for any challenge God calls us to.

Throughout his lifetime, Jeremiah was a lone figure. He never married for instance.

But crucial to his 'calling' was when God told him:

<sup>8</sup> *Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you,*

*'I am with you'* made all the difference to Jeremiah's calling.

**You might be listening today and thinking, this is great news for young people, but I am past job interviews and career planning.**

I'm retired, or semi-retired.

Well, our next reading is for you.

**I Corinthians 13: 1- 13 .**

**Our second reading is not so much about 'doing' as about 'being'**

**Not so much about ‘what is God calling us to do’, but what God is calling you (and me) to ‘be’.**

Be a loving person. That is what God is calling us to be at every stage of our lives.

Waitangi Day comes in the middle of this week. I know that it is sometimes a contentious day. The PCANZ, the Anglicans, Methodists and Catholics have official policies on the Treaty of Waitangi. We support the Treaty as a Covenant made between Maori and the Crown.

A lot of deep emotions have been stirred up recently, by a minor political party wanting to question the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi.

This is bringing out the best and the worst in people.

For the church it is a good time to remember our calling to be a just and loving body of people.

To see the image of God in one another; to strive for a just and loving society.

That is our greatest calling. Something we cannot achieve without the Spiritual strength that was in Christ, in Jeremiah, in Paul and in all the prophets ancient and modern.

F S HS Amen.