

Homily 2/06/2024

Speak Lord Your Servant is listening.

It was last Sunday here in this church that we celebrated the Feast of The Holy Trinity presided over by Bishop Brad Billings. And of course it was a significant event with Tara being formally received into the Anglican Church. I have no doubt that it would have been a very special occasion for Tara and her family. And it was indeed a very special occasion for we the parish community. It bolsters our faith to have someone make a public declaration of commitment. And it provides an opportunity for us all to reflect on our faith and our level of commitment. One day we may get the opportunity to hear Tara's faith story and how it has led to her becoming children's and families worker here in this parish.

It was appropriate that the first reading last week was about being called. Isaiah had a vision of God sitting on a throne surrounded by Seraphs (angels) singing "Holy holy holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory." In the presence of the almighty Isaiah acknowledged his sin and his brokenness. "woe is me, for I am a man of unclean lips". Isaiah was healed and forgiven by God. And in response to the Lord saying "whom shall I send" Isaiah responded "Here I am send me".

The first reading today is about the call of Samuel. Samuel was indeed a gift of God for his parents Hannah and Elkanah, because for many years the womb of Hannah had been closed. And for many years Hannah implored the Lord to grant her a male child whom she promised to would give back to God. Hannah conceived and gave birth to Samuel. And after weaning Samuel Hannah was true to her promise and gave up her child. And Samuel was raised by the priest

Eli in the house of the Lord. One night Samuel was lying down when the Lord called him. At first Samuel thought that it was Eli calling him. But at the instruction of Eli, Samuel responded to the Lord “Speak Lord your servant is listening”.

For both Isaiah and Samuel, the call was initiated by God. And Isaiah and Samuel are both changed by that encounter. The call of God requires a response, a yes to God. “Here I am” or “Speak Lord your servant is listening”. And then God gives a mission, which in the case of the prophets was to often give a warning to the people of Israel. Change your ways or else. The prophets were not popular.

Perhaps my favourite account of the call of a prophet, is the story of the call of Jeremiah. It was one of the readings that I chose for my ordination. The Lord says to Jeremiah “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you to be a prophet to the nations”. And Jeremiah responded “Ah Lord God, Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy”.

That was my feeling when I felt called. What God was asking seemed too much. But as I said we are changed by that encounter with God. And for me I so desired to experience that intimacy with God again.

But initially I focussed on my feelings of inadequacy rather than on the strength of God. Because God does equip us with the gifts that we need for ministry, and God is with us as we develop and mature.

But it is also true that we are always inadequate, imperfect, weak. We cannot do ministry alone. We must focus on God. And that message comes through very strongly in the second reading from Corinthians.

As Paul says in 2nd Corinthians, We proclaim Jesus Christ as Lord. And God has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in clay jars. What does this mean? We are this clay jar, the presence of God within us is the treasure. A clay jar is fragile. “But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us. And this power is God working through us. So the spiritual gifts that we have, are a gift from God, not to make us feel powerful, but for service.

This point is emphasised when Paul speaks of his own experience: We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair.

And it is a paradox of the Christian life that the closer we are to Christ the more we are conscious of our own inadequacy and need for God.

Last Monday evening I had the privilege of attending an evening at City on a Hill where Carl Beech spoke to a group of men from various denominations around Geelong. I attended in response to the invitation in last week’s parish bulletin. Who is Carl Beech? Well he lacks the physical stature of a Billy Graham. He is somewhat short of stature with a pot belly. He comes from east of London and sounded like a cockney to my ears. And for me that was somewhat appealing. In the case of Carl the man is the message. Carl spoke for about 45 min and at the end of his talk he hobbled off the stage with the aid of a walking stick.

Because Carl has parkinsons disease and type 1 diabetes. He mentioned that he may have 12 years to live. Carl suffers on a daily basis, physically from the pain of his condition. Mentally and emotionally because his beloved daughter was raped. He wasn’t

always physically encumbered. Previously he ran marathons and cycled great distances.

I know that Carl would identify strongly with the verse, 'we hold a treasure not made of gold in earthen vessels. And he is so profoundly aware of the treasure that he holds that he wants to preach about Jesus to particularly groups of men.

The more we are aware of our fragility the more we will rely on God to guide us. We can't do it in our own. We need to rely on God. We are a vessel. We are imperfect, we are still getting there.

And we are still getting there in relation to our indigenous brothers and sisters. This past week has been National Reconciliation Week with the theme of "Now More Than Ever". I know that many indigenous people were very deflated with the defeat of the referendum for an indigenous voice to parliament. Perhaps like Paul they felt afflicted but not crushed, struck down, but not destroyed. But the call to Reconciliation still rings loud and clear.

Reconciliation starts with each one of us. We each hold a treasure, the Lord the Christ. And that treasure gives us a dignity. Christ is at work in the hearts of people whether indigenous or non-indigenous. And it is Christ that can bring about reconciliation if we can acknowledge, respect and cherish different cultures.

Let us pray: Loving God without you we are nothing. We thank you for the treasure that you have given us. May we cherish the treasure within and may it guide each of us to reconciliation with one another. In Jesus name we pray: