

GPP Reflection for 26 January 2020

Readings: Isaiah 9: 2-3, Psalm 27, Matthew 4: 12 – 25, 1 Corinthians 1: 10 – 12

Song before Reflection: Arohanui Blessing

Reflection: LIGHT AND SALVATION

- *you are part of the wonderful mystery of God*
- *Jewish concept of salvation for community not individual*
- *Called individually to be light together*
- *Come and follow Jesus*

God is moving in this place. May the moving of God indeed bring you peace - and the mystery of God enfold you. You are a part of the mystery of God. Colin Gibson, New Zealand hymn writer has penned some wonderful words that extend this understanding:

I am a part of the pulse of creation, Eternity caught in a moment of time, part of the mystery, part of the beauty, part of the wonderful gifting of God.

Born in the Spirit and waking to freedom, Seeking to grow to the measure of Christ, Part of the mystery, part of the beauty, Part of the wondrous creation of God.

You are enfolded in the mystery of God. You are called by God, just as Andrew and Peter, James and John were called by Jesus. Jesus called them when they were going about their ordinary everyday work. Maybe that is where you were when you felt the call of God on your life?

As I have explained before, the lectionary readings for each Sunday were chosen many years ago by an international team of Biblical scholars who decided which parts of the Bible should be read publicly in churches each Sunday over a three year cycle. The intention was that part of every book of the Bible was read at least once in every three years, and the gospels were covered more intensely by having one of Matthew, Mark and Luke as a focus for each year. We are now in the year for Matthew, so today we heard Matthew's version of the calling of the fishermen disciples.

Jesus called them to follow him and learn from him about catching people instead of fish. They followed Jesus all over Galilee and through Judea to Jerusalem. They heard him teaching in the synagogues and preaching the Good News about the Kingdom of God. They stayed with Jesus and kept following and kept listening. They must have been really excited by what Jesus was saying and doing, because they did not return to their fishing – but kept following and listening. Jesus' message was that the Kingdom of God was very near, the Kingdom of God was within them. Jesus was preaching to Jews, as he lived the Jewish faith and concepts himself. Jesus was steeped in Jewish tradition and the focus of that tradition was that the Jewish people were God's chosen ones; that as a nation, a family, a group of tribes descended

from Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, their salvation was about the destiny of their holy nation, saved out of Egypt and led to the Promised Land. Jesus called the disciples to listen to a new way of being community, an enhanced understanding of what it means for the Kingdom of God to be within them. That message is also for us. Maybe God's message for you today is to listen intently to what Jesus taught and did and understand what it means to live with compassion for all, as he did – or to be excited about your adventure with God, as those disciples were.

That reading from Matthew and the Isaiah words and Psalm 27 which were our call to worship are all part of the lectionary readings. So is the 1 Corinthians reading. I did not deliberately choose any of these readings for today – they are the lectionary readings. The lectionary is encouraging us to explore Matthew's life of Jesus and the first letter to the Corinthians over the next few weeks.

Let's take a closer look at what Paul is saying to the church in Corinth. Most churches experience some kind of divisions and disagreements, or differences of opinion. We are all human after all and we have the potential to see things differently – and sometimes not listen very carefully to what others are really saying. What Paul had heard about the differences in Corinth was a bit more serious. It seems that the divisions were about whose message and leadership people were following. Some said 'I follow Paul', others said 'I follow Apollos', others 'I follow Peter' and only some said 'I follow Christ'. Paul was disturbed to hear that such factions had developed and that instead of all being followers of Jesus the Christ, some had decided to follow a particular leader or preacher in the church. We see that kind of process happening in churches still in the 21st century, even here in Gisborne – sometimes leaders set themselves up as all important and people identify with them rather than with the essence of being a follower of Jesus and living God's way. They split the congregation and leave to form a new church centred around the human leader.

Paul was concerned to see this happening in Corinth and went on to say 'Christ cannot be divided into groups'. He was encouraging them to honour God and follow Christ. That is our responsibility too – to honour God and follow Christ, living God's way.

Your congregational meeting today has the potential to divide into groups – not over leadership but over the time services begin. In many ways this is a very small thing but it has become huge for some people – an enormous issue that consumes thoughts and action and makes opponents of friends. Not so very long ago, all church services used to start at 11 a.m. but then, with the advent of other things to do on Sundays, like sports events, and the shops being open, changes happened. Services started earlier to allow people to do other things with their day.

All through his message to the Corinthians, Paul tells them to consider what is best for others, to think about everyone, not just their own needs and desires, like in chapter 8 where he suggests that eating meat sacrificed to idols may not hurt the one who eats it but that action may confuse a new Christian who does not understand. Paul focuses on love and concern for others being the

way of Christian living, of consideration of what effects your actions have on others.

On 9 June last year, in a Congregational Meeting, you showed consideration, love and concern for the Matawhero congregation, who are part of this parish, when you agreed to a six month trial of a time change – to allow less time pressure on services at Matawhero and for the minister to be able to stay for at least a few minutes of the fellowship time afterwards to talk with people. However, I was told that there are people who have not come to church since then, because of the time change. I'd like somebody to name even one for me – because I certainly can't identify who they might be.

No-one has told me that they have refused to come to church because of the time change – but I know there has been lots of mumbling and grumbling in corners – but no-one seems to think it is important to tell the minister. We need honesty, openness and integrity today because today there is the opportunity to review how that the time change has worked out and what time you want for the future for the start of St Andrew's services. As Paul did with the Corinthian Christians, I implore you to think carefully about what is best for all.

God through Isaiah promised light shining for all. Psalm 27 tells us God is our light and our salvation. We are called individually by God to be followers of Jesus, but to become a Christian community, to be the light of God together in the wider community - called individually to be light together. The light is stronger when it shines through many working together.

May the light of God shine through you as a community of faith.
May the wonder of God renew you and the loving of God flow through you
May you move and live and grow in Christ. God bless you. Amen.

We sing as part of our response to God

Lord your summons echoes true ... let me turn and follow you