***How Then Shall We Live* A Reflection for a Covenant Service**

Sunday 13th February 2022 Mosgiel

Jeremiah 17:5-10, Luke 6:17-26

How often growing up where you asked what you wanted to be when you left school? Did you have careers advise? Of course for most people throughout history what they do when they grew up was pretty much predetermined. Even now our circumstances and abilities mean our choices are limited to a degree at least.

When I was very small, I think inspired by the Apollo missions, my father told me I could be anything I want to be when I grew up. Even them I knew little boys growing up in mining towns in the English Midlands didn’t get to be astronauts. Later on my father told me that when he left school his school careers advisor had simply asked him which mine he was going down. Perhaps that explains the expansiveness of what he had said to me about doing anything.

I never got into Space, nor would I have wanted to but was the first person in my family to gat a degree and then post graduate qualifications. Something my generation in the family have all done and the next generation are doing. So for us anyway the boundaries of the possible ae being pushed further out.

But for Christians the question “what do you want to be” is not enough.

We are faced with the question, particularly on Covenant Sunday, of what are we called to? What is our vocation?

Christian vocation, is not evoked by your bundle of need and desire, what you want. Vocation is what God wants from you whereby your life is transformed into a consequence of God’s redemption of the world. We have talents innate to us yes, but the gift of vocation is different again. Look no further than Jesus’s disciples — remarkably mediocre, untalented, uninspiring – to see that innate talent or inner yearning has less to do with vocation than God’s thing for redeeming lives by assigning us something to do for God. Vocation is not an inclination within awaiting discovery by rooting around in the recesses of the ego, or a means of getting what I want out of life. Vocation is the call of God on us here and now. And as our Covenant Prayer say what we are called to we might relish orwe might want to run from.

I am not going to get out a sorting hat. If you have ever seen the Harry Potter films you will know what I mean. A new student sits under the sorting hat and declares which house she or he will be in. I am not going to wave a hat around that will say you should be a preacher, a steward, the church cleaner.

But I will seek to explore with you how we are to live through reflecting on today’s Gospel. The Sermon on the Plain.

Over this summer New Zealanders have had no real choice but to holiday domestically, Dunedin has been very keen to encourage people from around the country to take a break here and surely there is plenty to see or do. Yet how many people heading from the airport to the city where only aware of Mosgiel as somewhere the passed on their left? Few visitors turned off and stayed here. Dunedin – it seems – is sea and hills. The plain is overlooked even if those of us who live here know there is much to commend it.

Today we heard the Sermon on the Plain, which is presented to us in Luke in the way that the Sermon on the Mount is presented in Matthew. Now everyone, everyone has heard of the Sermon on the Mount – the Sermon on the Plain, well les so. Indeed like our place out here it is just a bit overlooked.

Maybe there is a scenic atttraction to the Sermon on the Mount, after all you would get a great view up there. There is also an echo the Jewish Christian followers of Jesus for whom Matthew was written would have surely picked up on, between Jesus giving his Sermon on the Mount and Moses bringing down the Ten Commandments from Sinai.

Also the Sermon on the Mount is easier on us,

In it we read Blessed are the Poor in Spirit, while we have just read Blessed are the Poor. There is no ambiguity about the Poor, we know who the Poor are , but the Poor in Spirit – well we can all be ever so humble now can’t we?

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, well don’t we all want that? Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you will be filled is that much more of a challenge, especially if you – as son many people have throughout history – routinely gone hungry.

Then there are those disconcerting woes we hear in the Sermon on the Plain, each blessing has a matching warning.

The Sermon on the Mount is lofty, soothing, inspirational. The Sermon on the Plain is, well, grounded, a little bit gritty and very real. This is a model of how faithful living is mean to be in very ordinary, day to day life. It is a happy accident that this is the Gospel appointed for today when we renew our Covenant; when we recommit ourselves to living faithfully.

Of course the view from the top of a hill or mountain is great, but actually living up there is challenging. Much of life is lived out here on the plain. In the ordinary and everyday places around the world where most people live and work, struggle and hope. Where most of us, according to our own lights, seek to live as well as we can.

According to our own lights, well they are not our lights alone are they? The light we live by – or seek to live by – as a Covenant people isn’t a light of our making but the light we have found ourselves drawn to. The Gospel, the way of Jesus.

We have found ourselves blessed. To be blessed, after all, is to know that you have God's attention. To know that whenever you go, you will not be alone. To be blessed is to know that you are valued and important simply because that is what the love of God does.

But being in a Covenant does not mean we have a monopoly on the love of God, the love of God is boundless for the whole of Creation and for everyone who lives.

The witness of Scripture though is God shaws a particular love for the those who are blessed in today’s account. The poor, the hungry, those oppressed by injustice and troubled by oppression.

And the judgment of God is on those who are complicit in their suffering, loss and displacement.

We have declared that we are open to God’s call on us, to be employed or laid aside, exalted or cast low, to do things that bring us joy and accomplishment and to do things that frankly we feel disinclined to but with a spirit of gladness. Whatever we are called to in this place and in the life of the Church we are called together to live in a particular way, a way that spreads and nurtures the blessings God promises.

Whatever our vocation is this itoo is our calling

May it be so among us Amen