

Message from Johanna Warren

I enjoyed meeting some more of you at the parish service in Rakaia on Sunday 29th May. I have asked Miranda to make the reflection available. Those of you who were there will find it is not exactly what you heard as I didn't read what I wrote. I hope that what I have written, which is written as a document to spark my speaking, is helpful. If not, pick up the phone and challenge me to go deeper. Johanna

Both these readings are about the Holy Spirit, about living as Christ's body on earth connected to God, obedient to God in as near as Jesus did a fashion as we can.

Acts seems to be written to show that what we now call the church, but then was possibly called people of the way, people living in the Way of Jesus, grew and developed because God, through the Holy Spirit guided and molded it.

Originally the church was part of Judaism, a group of Jews who adhered to Jesus as their teacher. Still worshipping in the synagogue living according to custom and law. The stories in Acts show Jews being challenged to accept non-Jews, pagans into their midst as followers of Jesus. And here we have a missionary party being led directly to another province of the Empire.

John chapter 14 is a poignant chapter of farewell and promises of hope. I will not leave you orphaned says Jesus the Advocate, the teacher, the guide, the comforter will come, because I am going to my Father.

This comforting teacher is still with us.

We can still find the Holy Spirit helping the world wide church grow and change.

We can still find that we are challenged to look at the world, at other people, at what God might want of us, differently.

How does the Holy Spirit do this, where do we find the Advocate in our lives?

Paul had a dream.

People still have literal dreams in the night and also dreams, visions, hopes of a different future.

Can you accept that dreams may be God speaking to us?

And sometimes God will speak to me through your dream, your imagination of something different?

Paul obviously discussed his dream with the team.

That I think is part of the clue of what church is

it is a body

a team

a family

a much bigger than any one or two of us

which if it is to be alive and well needs to be continually reshaped by the teaching advocate.

If we still worship the same God Jesus and Paul worshipped then God will still send dreams and ideas and questions and challenges.

and invite us together to meet and consider those dreams and challenges.

And like Paul, Silas and Timothy

Maybe even Luke, he starts writing 'we' in this chapter...

we can discuss the dreams the ideas.

The Holy Spirit may then speak to us in the words we say to one another in the questions we ask and in the wonderings we raise and the possibilities we try out in discussion we will hear not only our own preconceived ideas and attitudes, but also sometimes the teaching or guiding of God, of Jesus, the voice of the Spirit.

Then there is prayer.

Prayer may include us talking directly to God.

It may include us reading and dwelling on scripture, allowing God some time to speak to us through the words in the Bible, the stories or songs or prayers of our forebears.

The hymns we sing at home as we vacuum or here in church may also be prayer, and another opportunity for the Holy Spirit to get a word into our heart, or lodge a word in our mind.

Prayer is also listening. we listen to what might bubble up in our heart when we are still we listen for what God may bring to our attention.

Paul writes of the Spirit uttering groans too deep in our hearts for us to be able to articulate them. In the silence God hears these deep cries, for God knows us better than we know ourselves, and sometimes, just sometimes the Holy Spirit does make these deep hidden cries clear to us, we can then find that there is a shift in us, something moves in our hearts in our mind a direction for living may become more clear.

All of this frequently with very few actual words.

But a change within that we are clear about.

One of my mentors in the faith recognised in her life regular God nudges. They were impulse to do or not do something.

They could be as simple as pick up the phone and ring so and so

or as big as it is time to sell the house. and often she responded obediently to them and found clarity and joy in living. And served us around her with love and prayer and care.

We as a church are at a crossroads

We are wondering if the Holy Spirit has guidance for us
go in that direction, don't go there... guidance.

We call the MSB as a team to help us think through these questions, to listen for God's word as they look deeply into our lives.

We call our Governance Council to listen carefully as they manage the immediate future, the day to day year by year leading we need as a parish.

Let us pray for both these teams

that they can work as teams

that they can communicate well with each other and with us

and if you yourself feel that you have a picture of something that could be, that you are noticing something

feeling something that could help us look at ourselves more clearly
or look at a possibility for the future
invite someone to sit and talk it through and ask God for clarity
then speak up
write to the MSB, talk directly to Governance Council,
you can always ring me.

Jesus' promise to the disciples is also a promise to us.

Paul and Silas are not just a history lesson

They're our great grandparents in the business of being church and in God's eternity they are still in communion with us still cheering us on

So be brave, expect God to speak up to us, and watch for fleeting visions,
listen for surprising comments,
take notice of words or ideas that lodge in your heart and won't go away.

take notice of what is making you angry

or sad

or glad

because in all of those ways, and others, God's Advocate will try to get our attention,
help us see with God's eyes,
and pause us to listen for clearer directions.

Finally, going back to Judas' question to Jesus which did not get answered? Why do you not reveal yourself to the world,

perhaps it is through us that Jesus does the revealing, and the Advocate is the prime means by which Jesus guides this revelation

the revealing is through how we live life

not what we say

how we live