

Notes for Sermon delivered 28 May 2006 by Revd Susanna Pain
Acts 1:15-17, 21-26
Holy Covenant Anglican Church, Jamison

‘The way of faith is entrusting God with the concerns and content of our time.’
(Seasons of the Spirit)

I’ve been in Galong, near Young, these past few days speaking at a Clergy Spouses Conference.

During the time together people shared with each other some of their story, and God’s part in it.

I spoke, among other things, of my calling to the ordained ministry.

In 1985, I explored the option of studying Theology at St Marks. At the time I was working at the Dept of Immigration in Sydney. I wanted to study to learn more about what I believed in, and Canberra seemed the sensible place as my parents lived here, and I knew the then principal, Bruce Wilson. I came down to suss it out. I even went to speak to the Bishop, Bishop Owen. I was accepted into the ministry program. I went home, and had second thoughts – After all I’d just split up from a deep relationship – maybe it was a rebound. I decided not to go to Canberra just then, but to defer for a year...

Then I was a bit more ready – though in the end I only came because I was in love with someone in Canberra! (Someone told me to follow my heart) God works in mysterious ways.

I began my studies in 1987 as an independent student ... I loved it!

- ... sense of calling – other people said ‘You’d be good at that’ ...
- First women ordained – vision – making it up – just because of other people – ‘but I’m not committed enough. I want to get married and have children.’
- Worked as a social Worker at Old Canberra Hospital where I was faced with death.

. My boyfriend, David, had died when I was 18. I decided to visit his parents and find out more about his death. His father was the rector of Braidwood at the time. We talked. Then his Father asked, ‘Where are you at with ordination?’ I replied that ‘I haven’t done anything because I’m not committed enough as I want to get married and have children’ ‘You can do both, you know’ He replied.

Then later David’s mother said ‘ It says somewhere in the scriptures, “when you put your hand to the plough, you’ve got to keep moving forward and not look back.”’ So I began to explore ordination further.

- ‘not fair, you always win’ Fight with God – rebellion
- discuss discernment
- panel & Psych test, referees ...

- in the end, a journey of freedom, fullness
- 'the way I can be fully myself & fully serve God'

Deacon '89
 ... move the goal post
 until priested '92 ...

Some of you journeyed that time with me ...

I tell you this story to illustrate the winding path that leads to life, and the surprising twists and insights along the way.

In today's reading from the book of Acts we catch a glimpse of another discernment process.

Judas, one of the twelve who had been there from the beginning, had died and the disciples had gathered together to choose a replacement – to make up the 12, symbolizing the 12 tribes of Israel. Men & women were gathered, including members of Jesus biological family. No doubt they discussed the options; it had to be someone who'd been there all along.

Somehow they came to a short-list of two.

Then in the time-honoured tradition of those days –
 they prayed
 & cast lots – leaving it to God to have the final say!!

(No psych tests, examining chaplains & vocation panels in those days!)

Consider, how do we as parish make decisions? Do we always incorporate prayer into our decision making? Are we open to God's guidance? Do we weigh the options then leave it in God's hands?

It seems to me, 'the way of faith is an intimate dance of trusting & acting' ... which requires openness and independence - & response. (*Seasons of the Spirit*)

Let's explore the dance a little further – and see whether there are any clues to how we listen & discern the way forward ...

Some of the questions we may ask ourselves are:

Are we choosing life, moving towards greater personal wholeness & a more just & loving world?

Or are we consciously or unconsciously strengthening the power of death & evil in our own lives and in society?

What does God want us to do or be?

Here are some hints for your own journey & for participating in discussion:

- 1) Listen to your deepest self – what does your heart desire?
 - What gives you life?
 - What do you enjoy?Movement of God in our lives emerges as we come to know our deepest selves. (Lankin, *The Woman at the Well – Feminist Perspectives in Spiritual Direction* p114)
 - When we come closest to the real self we are closest to God.
 - What drains your energy?

- 2) Affirm your own as well as others' needs ...
 - Could someone else do the job?
 - If I do it does it rob someone else of the opportunity?

- 3) Trust info that comes from your body:
 - Intuition
 - Feelings

Rest awhile

- 4) Be aware of social & cultural factors influencing situation

- 5) Generate alternatives

- 6) Take account of price of change. How does it affect family?
 - Could someone else do it?
 - Does it fit the bigger scheme?
 - Remuneration?
 - Affirmation?
 - Does doing it make you more peaceful or unsettled?
 - Does it expand you?

Finding the path to growth & holiness –

Are we choosing life, moving toward greater personal wholeness & a more just & loving world?

Or are we consciously or unconsciously strengthening the power of death & evil in our lives & in society?

I am concerned that some here are doing too much – the dis-ease of our time ...

Quote from *The Adelaide Church Guardian*, May 1996, p.6

Directions

by Philip Carter

All the time I need

In *Aspects of the Novel*, the novelist E.M. Forster wrote: “Daily life, whatever it may be really, is practically composed of two lives – the life in time and the life by value – and our conduct reveals our double allegiance.”

Many of us constantly complain that we don't have enough time. For us, time has become the enemy. If only we had the time, we say. If only! As if we could have more time than we have already!

The truth of the matter is that God is to be sought and found within time as it is. God chooses to be met in ordinary, everyday time. So it is not lack of time, for example that robs us of time for prayer, or denies our good intentions to love our neighbours.

As E.M. Forster rightly puts it: time, and what we do with it, reflects our values. We end up by doing what we want to do. It feels like a hard saying, but it's true. I might say I want to pray more, but I end up doing anything but pray. I'd like to write more letters, too, and support more causes, and live a more balanced life, but I don't, because I want to do other things more.

What I need is the courage to seek how quickly I pander to my surface needs or wants and how easily I feed my insecurities and inadequacies. Of course, I don't have enough time because I'm so busy filling my diary or looking busy or always trying to meet others' expectations.

If I can be courageous enough to face this inner truth, I might not only listen to, but begin to live out of, a deeper part of myself. Now I could begin to live out of my values, out of what I most really want. I could discover an inner freedom and generosity, far beyond the treadmill of more effort and willpower.

Every moment then would become the right time (what the New Testament calls *kairos* time as opposed to chronological time), the time which has something of eternity about it.