

Sermon: Revd Susanna Pain
8 June 2008

I never was very good at jigsaw puzzles. I can usually find the corners and some of the side bits, but after a while I lose patience, and anyway each piece of the puzzle has its own story to tell.

I know some people like to see the big picture, the whole, to see where they fit in, before being able to contribute. Some seem almost unable to go beyond the minute – they can't move beyond their own small piece.

Others are happy, as long as they are connected with some others. They accept there are loose ends.

Yet in all these scenarios, each fragment is important – especially if that piece is yours or mine. If we lose any; the picture cannot be complete – something is missing.

Each week we come to church and hear only part of the story. We overhear snatches of the conversation of the scripture. We often miss the context, and can't even identify the speaker or where they are from. Today we heard a reading from Genesis 12, the first book of the bible. We heard God calling Abram and Sarai to leave their lives and journey with God. Just this tiny fragment we notice its colour and textures and are left with unanswered questions - what brought them to this point? How did they recognise this God? Where to from here? How did they feel? What were their thoughts? Why, why did they follow?

In the gospel, we heard snippets of several people's lives and their encounters with Jesus. First there was Matthew, tax collector, outsider, well to do. How did he even know who Jesus was? What was happening in his life that enabled him to listen, and to follow – and not have Jesus thrown out on his ear? What brought him to this point?

And after the dinner party, what happened? Who was Jesus for Matthew and his wild friends?

Then there was the leader of the synagogue – respectable man, desperate, life unravelling because his 12 year old daughter had just died. He was undone and he asked Jesus' help. What stories would he tell us? And his daughter starting off in life, does she live to old age? What will she tell her children and grand children – about this day? These are small fragments, pieces of the puzzle.

And the unnamed woman, bleeding. Who is she? What brings her to Jesus? What is she like? I would love to have a conversation with her.

These pieces of the story, how do these fit together – what picture is emerging? What do they tell us of God? How do they speak to you personally? Does anything resonate?

Last Saturday some of us spent the day at St Mark's Theological College at a Quiet Day – reflecting and praying. Our leader, Rob Moore, outlined a process - for prayer – a way that I'm sure many of you are familiar with 'lectio divina' or holy reading.

In lectio divina one takes a small portion of scripture and reads it, listening for 'the small voice' of God; reading slowly and gently, allowing a word or phrase to speak. When a word or phrase calls to you, let the rest go and stay with that word – repeat it, chew over it. Ruminates. Let God speak to you – maybe even allow yourself to enter the story. Soak yourself in the word then let a prayer arise in words or image or idea. Talk to God about your experience, listen to the response, grapple, converse.

Interact with God as you would with one who you know loves and accepts you. And give to God what you have discovered in yourself during your experiences of meditation. Experience God using the word or phrase that God has given you as a means of blessing, of transforming the ideas and memories, which your pondering has awakened. Give to God what you have found within your heart.

Try to make sense of the word with God – what are you saying to me God?

Then finally, rest in God's embrace in comfortable silence – rest - no need for words sometimes. Celebrate that God is with you in both words and silence.

This process, this holy reading can be used for the scriptures, but also for the whole of life – in this service listen to the hymns, mull over them, the sermon, the prayers...

What strikes you, stay with it and let it lead you into prayer.

This piece of the puzzle, fragment of the picture, can lead you to all sorts of places and make unexpected connections.

This week, I have been praying with the Genesis reading and the Matthew reading set for today, and each day letting a word or phrase speak to me, and inform my life and my choices.

On Tuesday, after slowly reading both passages several times what spoke to me were two small phrases from Genesis 12:2

'you will be a blessing'

'I will bless you'

These phrases moved with me through the day. They became prayer as I met with others over coffee, by a bed, massaging, in a meeting 'you will be a blessing' 'I will bless you'.

I recalled Abram and Sarah stepping into the unknown future and all that was yet to happen.

I wondered how I will be a blessing and reflected on my need to care for myself so that I can be a blessing.

I pondered how others bless me in so many ways – like the wonderful children at Playgroup on Friday singing together, laughing and playing – what a blessing they are to me.

And you, each one of you in your joys, your struggles, your questions – you too are a blessing to me.

This community is a blessing to me and to others. I know not perfect, sure, but growing, whole beautiful – reaching out to receive God's generous love, reaching out to each other, and to the community through so many acts of service – large and small. God says to you:

'you are a blessing, I will bless you...'

In praying with these words - this tiny piece of the puzzle - I make some connections – I draw closer to God and myself and others.

Remember the hymn we ended with last Sunday
'Live, live, live as a blessing' ...

Then, I read of these people, wonderful people in Matthew and their encounters with Jesus – Matthew, the synagogue leader, his daughter, and the unnamed woman and they teach me so much about faith. I am connected to their stories. They speak to me. Jesus actions' and words speak to me,

Jesus came not to call the righteous but to call sinners. We came to God with all the broken pieces of our lives. And the love of God restores us to one another.

The love of God makes us whole. The love of God empowers us to serve. Let us receive the good news and live in the restoring love of God together. Amen. (Seasons of the Spirit)

Matthew 9:9

'As Jesus moved further on, he saw a man called Matthew sitting in the tax office. Jesus said: 'Follow me'. Matthew stood up and followed him'

On Wednesday, I heard 'follow me' and you'll meet all sorts of people on the edges of society 'I desire mercy not sacrifice' social justice not empty ritual, getting out there. If I follow you, I get up early to pray, I walk. I walk from place to place. I invite. I challenge. My presence is a blessing and healing.

'Follow me' he says, and he ate with Matthew – the tax collector – outsider – humanity unravelling, and met his friends. The synagogue leader asked him to heal his daughter who had died – to bring life where there was deadness,

and the woman, bleeding, also unclean, like the dead body of the teenage girl
– the woman reached out her hand to touch.

Matthew 9:9-13

See Christ enter a dockside pub
Where folk are what they seem
To joke with barmaid Sal
And share a counter lunch
With tattooed Mal
The new bloke in his team.

See him in a koori* camp
When the night fire grows dim
To speak with teenage Clare
And hear her hopes and dreams
And ask her if she'd dare
To come and follow him.

See him in a vagrant's squat
With a cold and lonely wait
To meet a once proud bloke
And share some fish and chips
With cocaine Jock
And ask him to be a mate.

See him in the main street
Walking against the trend
Of the pious in the town
Who spurn his open love
And convene very soon
To plot his lonely end.

*koori = aboriginal
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'Take heart' he said, 'your faith has made you well.'

'Take heart' these words I also sat with – 'take heart' – be encouraged – 'take heart.'

So I say to you too 'take heart' and God says 'you shall be a blessing, I will bless you.'

I say 'I am blessed with rich experiences of Grace.'

'Follow me' says he, 'what riches you will discover.'

