

2 July - Refugee Sunday - The Cost of the Call

COLLECT

God of hospitality, even a glass of water given in your name is rewarded beyond measure. So fill our hearts with love that we welcome all in your name, through Jesus Christ, who is alive with the Holy Spirit, on God, now and forever. Amen

Gen 22:1-14 Ps 13 Rom 6:12-23 Matt 10:40-42

Genesis 22:1-14 (NRSVA)

The Command to Sacrifice Isaac

22 After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' ²He said, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt-offering on one of the mountains that I shall show you.' ³So Abraham rose early in the morning, saddled his donkey, and took two of his young men with him, and his son Isaac; he cut the wood for the burnt-offering, and set out and went to the place in the distance that God had shown him. ⁴On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place far away. ⁵Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; the boy and I will go over there; we will worship, and then we will come back to you.' ⁶Abraham took the wood of the burnt-offering and laid it on his son Isaac, and he himself carried the fire and the knife. So the two of them walked on together. ⁷Isaac said to his father Abraham, 'Father!' And he said, 'Here I am, my son.' He said, 'The fire and the wood are here, but where is the lamb for a burnt-offering?' ⁸Abraham said, 'God himself will provide the lamb for a burnt-offering, my son.' So the two of them walked on together.

⁹When they came to the place that God had shown him, Abraham built an altar there and laid the wood in order. He bound his son Isaac, and laid him on the altar, on top of the wood. ¹⁰Then Abraham reached out his hand and took the knife to kill his son. ¹¹But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven, and said, 'Abraham, Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' ¹²He said, 'Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son,

your only son, from me.’¹³ And Abraham looked up and saw a ram, caught in a thicket by its horns. Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt-offering instead of his son. ¹⁴ So Abraham called that place ‘The LORD will provide’;^[b] as it is said to this day, ‘On the mount of the LORD it shall be provided.’^[c]

Footnotes:

- a. [Genesis 22:10](#) Or *to slaughter*
- b. [Genesis 22:14](#) Or *will see*; Heb traditionally transliterated *Jehovah Jireh*
- c. [Genesis 22:14](#) Or *he shall be seen*

Psalm 13 (NRSVA)

Prayer for Deliverance from Enemies

To the leader. A Psalm of David.

¹How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever?

How long will you hide your face from me?

²How long must I bear pain^[a] in my soul,

and have sorrow in my heart all day long?

How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?

³Consider and answer me, O LORD my God!

Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep the sleep of death,

⁴and my enemy will say, ‘I have prevailed’;

my foes will rejoice because I am shaken.

⁵But I trusted in your steadfast love;

my heart shall rejoice in your salvation.

⁶I will sing to the LORD,

because he has dealt bountifully with me.

Footnotes:

- a. [Psalm 13:2](#) Syr: Heb *hold counsels*

Romans 6:12-23 (NRSVA)

¹²Therefore, do not let sin exercise dominion in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. ¹³No longer present your members to sin as instruments^[a] of wickedness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and present your members to God as instruments^[b] of righteousness. ¹⁴For sin will have no dominion over you, since you are not under law but under grace.

Slaves of Righteousness

¹⁵What then? Should we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means! ¹⁶Do you not know that if you present yourselves to anyone as obedient slaves, you are slaves of the one whom you obey, either of sin, which leads to death, or of obedience, which leads to righteousness? ¹⁷But thanks be to God that you, having once been slaves of sin, have become obedient from the heart to the form of teaching to which you were entrusted, ¹⁸and that you, having been set free from sin, have become slaves of righteousness. ¹⁹I am speaking in human terms because of your natural limitations.^[c] For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to greater and greater iniquity, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness for sanctification.

²⁰When you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness. ²¹So what advantage did you then get from the things of which you now are ashamed? The end of those things is death. ²²But now that you have been freed from sin and enslaved to God, the advantage you get is sanctification. The end is eternal life. ²³For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Footnotes:

- a. [Romans 6:13](#) Or *weapons*
- b. [Romans 6:13](#) Or *weapons*
- c. [Romans 6:19](#) Gk *the weakness of your flesh*

Matthew 10:40-42 (NRSVA)

Rewards

⁴⁰Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me. ⁴¹Whoever welcomes a prophet in the name of a prophet will receive a prophet's reward; and whoever welcomes a righteous person in the name of a righteous person will receive the reward of the righteous; ⁴²and whoever gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones in the name of a disciple—truly I tell you, none of these will lose their reward.'

Message - 2 July - Terry Alve

Today is **Refugee Sunday**.

Our readings today revolve around today's theme: **The Cost of the Call**

I would like to weave these two themes together by telling some stories.

A CORRECT ASSUMPTION

A man was being tailgated by a stressed out woman on a busy street. Suddenly, the light turned orange, just in front of him. He did the right thing, stopping at the crossing, even though he could have beaten The red light by accelerating through the intersection.

The tailgating woman was furious and tooted her horn, screaming in frustration as she missed her chance to get through the intersection, dropping her cell phone and makeup.

As she was still in mid-rave, she heard a tap on her window and looked up into the face of a very serious policeman. The policeman ordered her to exit her car. He took her to the police station where she was searched, finger printed, photographed, and placed in a holding cell. After a couple of hours, a policeman approached the cell and opened the door. She was escorted back to the counter where the arresting police officer was waiting with her personal effects.

He said, "I'm very sorry for this mistake. You see, I pulled up behind your car while you were blowing your horn, mouthing obscenities to the guy in front of you, and cursing him. I noticed the 'What Would Jesus Do' bumper sticker, the 'Choose Life' license plate holder, the 'Follow Me to Sunday-School' bumper sticker, and the chrome-plated Christian fish emblem on the boot, Naturally... I assumed you had stolen the car."

As always, I invite you to take from this message and its stories what speaks to you today. Others here may be moved by different things. Hopefully all of us will find something that is from God for us.

A 2nd story is the one we heard in today's OT reading. In summary, Abraham was tested by God who asked him to sacrifice his son and heir Isaac as a burnt offering in the mountains of Moriah. In obedience Abraham built an altar, laid wood on it, bound his son and took his knife to kill him. At that moment an angel of **the Lord commended Abraham for not withholding his only son from God but fearing God**, and suddenly there was a ram caught by its thorns in a thicket which became the offering.

The cost of Abraham's call on that occasion was obedience to do what God asked despite the cost.

Two weeks ago on Tuesday was Refugee day - 20th June. You have heard the news reports of our Bp Justin and clergy and laity of the diocese joining refugees, politicians and others to highlight the need in our country to offer refuge to Syrians and others who will likely die if not granted refugee asylum. Part of the message that day was an appeal for NZ to double its refugee quota from 750 to 1500. And there is a current petition to that effect at: www.doingourbit.co.nz

While there are theological, humanitarian and political arguments raging about what is right in this regard; it seems to me that the more important issue for us as disciples of Christ is that we are, as we have been doing, willing to engage with refugees and listen to their stories and learn from their gratitude and their overcoming spirit as they embrace the new life and opportunities they have received.

Sue, preaching last Sunday from Mt. 10, rightly highlighted the refrain offered to disciples, "Do not be afraid". God is with us and as we stay close to God we have nothing to fear. Words relevant as we engage in the refugee debate!

The last few verses of Mt.10 were our Gospel reading today. It speaks of the call for us to welcome and be hospitable. In so doing we honour God and, as we read elsewhere in Hebrews:

Hebrews 13:2

Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it. (NRSVA)

This week I have been doing a bit of that... supping with angels, I think. I took a train ride into central Wellington yesterday. My objective was to attend a service in St Mary of the Angels church in Boulcott St. However, as you are aware, Lions supporters were in town yesterday en masse. In fact my first conversation (on the train) was with a guy my age from outside Manchester who had just come off his international flight over night. He was obviously a bit jet lagged as he prepared to watch last night's test with his son. Not far from the Railway station the Lions' tour bus was parked with most of the Lions onboard but a few loitering outside it. As I continued my journey along Featherston St. and Willis St. there were Lions everywhere, many happy to engage in a bit of banter with a kiwi bloke in no great hurry to get to his destination. In the cafes, having a smoke, shopping they were very distinctive in their red attire with pommy accents. A 60's something roofer from York was quietly optimistic that the day would be the Lions' when it came to the rugby test; after all they love the rain! So were they, are they, angels. Well if pot bellies, grey hairs and red clothing are the stuff of angels they were. They were in Wellington to be entertained; we, the people of Wellington, were their hosts and it seemed to me that the least I could do was try and make a few of them feel welcome; over to God to do the rest...

Bp. Justin speaking of the Wellington combined communities effort for Refugees said on Refugee Day, "**This initial response transformed into partnership with the Red Cross, the Catholic Diocese of Wellington, and Muslim groups, to provide the household goods to settle each refugee intake to Wellington.** Every few months since then, groups of volunteers collect donated household goods, sort and package these, check electrical appliances, attend training, go out to empty homes, and set up houses ready for refugees who will arrive into Wellington the next day begin their new lives in our community. The flow of goods and volunteers has not stopped. **Wellingtonians and beyond have generous and capacious hearts.** [wrt Lions Supporters?]

We are still ready and still waiting to help.

On the other side of the globe, people are still fleeing their homes, the highest number of displaced people since World War Two. And they are still drowning – more than 5,000 just crossing the Mediterranean last year.

These people need a home."

Visiting with parish and vestry member Heather Pubben on Friday, I learned that St Hilda's are not new at supporting Refugees. She spoke of her involvement welcoming and supporting Sudanese refugees some years ago, as if it were the most natural thing to be doing when the call goes out. Perhaps you remember, some of you...?

I was in Wellington yesterday, not so much to Welcome Lions supporters, but to help my friend Marist Father Peter Ewart to celebrate the 50th (Jubilee) anniversary of his priestly ordination. I'd never been in St Mary's and was particularly curious to visit given the church has recently re-opened after EQ strengthening and repairs. It was a well attended service at 11am in a beautiful church followed by nearly 2 hours over a well catered dinner in the Parish centre. This time I was on the receiving end of some wonderful hospitality offered by Peter and his 14 Marist priest con freres and other supporters and friends. I think I was the only protestant there but I was reminded of how well Catholics do hospitality. I was taken back in my mind to my relationship with Maureen who was the eldest in a catholic family of seven who attended Our Lady of Victories church in Sockburn, ChCh. We got married there and it was where her requiem mass was held as we celebrated her short life after less than 2 years of marriage. Was I the angel being entertained by this group of Catholics unaware? Probably not, but interesting to muse and live with fond memories.

But let's go back to Friday. In addition to visiting with Heather, for whom we pray following her hip surgery, there were other poignant visits. Time permits I share only one more.

A few weeks ago I mentioned Jim the ex-prisoner whom I visited with Judy and a couple from Prison Fellowship as we prayed blessing on his home. In Friday's follow-up visit Jim reported how blessed he was that he has inherited some of the possessions of his friend David who lived in a flat above him before dying recently. As a result Jim has more household goods than he knows what to do with and is keen that they go to needy people. He has been on the receiving end of much support from many over the years and has been quite powerless to be generous to others. I sensed as we talked, and as he expressed his enthusiasm for his good fortune, that he was so blest to have been empowered to serve someone else. After an enthusiastic hug with Jim I made to leave. He chose to walk the long drive with me and to muse that it will be a year this month since he left prison and he noted he hasn't stolen from anyone during that time! Is Jim the kind of Angel that the Hebrews writer was talking about? Possibly. Let's conclude with this scripture:

The Good News of Deliverance

61 The spirit of the Lord God is upon me,
because the Lord has anointed me;
he has sent me to bring good news to the oppressed,
to bind up the broken-hearted,
to proclaim liberty to the captives,
and release to the prisoners;
2 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour,
[Year of Jubilee - Captives freed]
and the day of vengeance of our God;
to comfort all who mourn;
3 to provide for those who mourn in Zion—
to give them a garland instead of ashes,
the oil of gladness instead of mourning,
the mantle of praise instead of a faint spirit.
They will be called oaks of righteousness,
the planting of the Lord, to display his glory.

Please pray with me for Jim's progress in faith and in all respects as he works so hard to build on his successful year... and as he prepares to be welcomed back to his Northland marae

And let us also pray that God would give us ears to hear words of encouragement and words of challenge as we reflect on these stories; as we reflect on our own stories; and as we journey with malleable and open hearts.