

# Peace Journeys

Pitt Street Uniting Church, 3 July 2016

A Contemporary Reflection by Rev Dr Margaret Mayman

Pentecost 7C

Galatians 6: 7-16; Luke 10:1-11, 16-20;

Contemporary reading: *The Journey* by Mary Oliver

This reflection can be viewed on You Tube at <http://www.pittstreetuniting.org.au/> under "News and Events" tab

---

So this morning I'm leaving the post-electoral analysis to the newspapers and the pundits. Apart from a strong swing against the government, we don't yet know what the final result will be. But whatever the outcome, we are still called to act justly, to love compassion, and to walk humbly with our God, as we make our way in the world.

The last time, 3 years ago, that I encountered the gospel reading about travelling light with no purse, no bag, no sandals, I was still in Wellington, but I was "in conversation" with the JNC considering whether I was indeed called to ministry at Pitt Street. There were obviously all sorts of deep and meaningful things to reflect on. What would it mean to leave the congregation I had ministered with for twelve years and what it would mean to begin again in a new place. What I was being called to do next?

But I remember reading the gospel we heard this morning and I just thought about how much stuff Clare and I had accumulated in our years in Wellington, and what a royal pain it would be to move. In Wellington, for the first time, we'd owned our own house. A seventies house with excellent storage. And we'd rather filled it with stuff.

And so we began, even before the JNC process was complete, to de-clutter and diminish the amount of stuff we lived with. Because whether we were moving or not, it felt liberating.

More recently I've had conversations with Pitt Street people about the downsizing that comes with ageing, when people move from what was "the family home" into smaller, more manageable houses or into retirement communities. And Clare's ministry in aged care chaplaincy is spent with people whose "stuff" now all fits in the one room that they have in an aged care facility. That's a sobering thought for many of us!

There is a movement called the 100 Things challenge. It involves a commitment to live more simply, with only 100 things. 100 Things is a grass roots movement of people who believe that accumulation and stuff oppress us. It's intriguing and really, when I think about it, it sounds impossible. Though I do understand that, in this system, that a pair or collection of some things can count as one thing. This would only be possible for me if "library" could count as one thing!

Another manifestation of the same impulse is found in the teaching of Japanese decluttering guru Marie Kondo. In her method, you touch everything you own and ask “does this spark joy in me?”.

I think there is spiritual wisdom in these secular movements. For Christians they resonate with the gospel call of the one that we follow to travel lightly. But the gospel also asks more of us. Not only to examine what we are letting go because decluttering makes us feel better, but to choose to live differently for the sake of others.

In the reading from Luke, we hear Jesus commissioning the disciples, sending them out to preach to the Gentiles. He tells them to carry no purse, no bag, no sandals. It’s not an easy text to preach on, or to hear, for a middle class minister in a predominantly middle class congregation.

Among us today, there is a small number who travel light through life, unencumbered by home ownership or too many possessions. But whether we have possessions or not, perhaps particularly if we do not, we worry about them. And those of us who in reality have more than enough, for ourselves and our families, but not as much as we think we would like, tend to worry the most.

Mary Oliver’s poem “*The Journey*” is also about commissioning. In going out into the world, we save our own lives when we leave behind those voices that shout their bad advice. These are the voices that have predominated during the election campaign. Voices that demand that we conform to the values of a consumeristic and fearful society. At first reading, Mary Oliver’s poem can sound individualistic, but I think she is inviting her readers to pay attention to their own lives, to the still small voice, in order to truly be real in the world. Whether it is the voice of conscience, or the voice of God, the voice comes to us because we seek a new society, a community of justice-seeking friends. This true voice reminds us who we really are and who we are called to be.

The Luke passage also invites us to reflect on how we are in the world, the aspects of the world we are to embrace and the aspects we are to engage with critically. At no point is it telling us to withdraw from the world and manufacture a safe Christian enclave to avoid the challenges and the problems that living in the world raises up.

Jesus says less is more, less is better, because this way more is available to share with others. Carry no purse, because a purse is for wealth, for extra cash. Wages are enough, and a disciple can trade healing for hospitality. “*Eat what is set before you.*” He talks here to disciples who are going to Gentile territory, probably for the first time and tells them, “*Eat what Gentiles offer you.*” Given Jewish cultural and religious expectations around food, this was a radical command.

Jesus calls the Church to practice incarnation. The missionary church failed to do this when it tried to make 19th century English folk out of indigenous people. Church and state in Australia failed this test terribly, when having failed to make Aboriginal people conform to western culture, they stole a generation of children to enculturate them into white ways. The missionary church also failed when it taught the world to practice its homophobia and negativity toward sex, and expected the world to emulate its classism and racism.

In this text, we hear that it is people who are important, not accumulation of land and wealth. Jesus calls us to announce "Peace". Peace, wherever we go, to be a healing community, to go barefoot, to dispense with what we don't need.

Charity is not enough. The call is to justice. Justice begins the way God begins justice-- with listening to the cries of the oppressed, to the poor in this land, and not turning away from the cries of the people that our rulers have tortured and tormented and ridiculed, exiled and bombed.

Jesus gives us ten ways of understanding mission:

1. to start with prayer (however you understand it),
2. to build up your courage (we need one another),
3. to live simple lives,
4. to be peace people,
5. to depend on others,
6. to practice hospitality,
7. but also to live with hospitality and live with environmental sensitivity, (for the world was here before the Church arrived, and we are its guests),
8. to heal the sick with prayer and/or medicine,
9. to go with the flow, roll like a rolling stone; and
10. to know where our authority lies: it is the authority of God made known to us in Jesus, the liberating one.

When the disciples return, having been tested by their struggle in mission, they are delighted and Jesus is delighted with them. Why? There are still only seventy of them. Fewer than most of our gatherings here on a Sunday. No great crowds to follow them, and they don't have their empty purses now filled with imperial currency. They are still barefoot, and probably more in need of a bath than when they left. But they rejoice, because demons (which I think means the powers that be). The powers that be have been subject to them. Jesus rejoices with them.

Jesus says to them: Be glad not so much in the fact that powers get out of your way, but be glad that your names are written in heaven, which simply means that your lives, now living in this way, have ultimate value.

Lies and delusions are the snakes and scorpions we walk over, they are the fantasies of race and capitalism, of militarism, of wealth accumulation and fame. The good news that we hear in this passage is that these cannot harm us, and Jesus calls us as healed people, as recovered and resurrected friends, to heal sickness in the land, and bring health to the planet.

The resurrected Christ, the Christ still living among us in the form of hope for a better world, watches still to see an end to the power of death in our society, to see an end to the devil of profits over people, to see an end to a Church hankering after the life styles of the rich and famous, and instead to see a Church that unloads its baggage so that it is ready to hit the road.

We are called to adopt a model of community that is mutually supportive, committed to sharing the responsibilities of common life. We are taught by the Liberating One that the mission of the Church is not to be one that could be mistaken for a life of privilege and power.

The global market economy has been justified in the name of Jesus. We have labelled market economies 'free' and asserted that they give people an opportunity to 'better their lives' but someone always pays in this system. There is always going to be someone, lots of someones, at the bottom of the economic pyramid. This is a crucial premise of '*competitive markets*.' It is more than survival of the fittest; it is the creation of humanity where the vast many serve the select few.

When we think about who we are as individuals and as a faith community, will the world know that our message is 'peace' and 'the nearness of God's reign'?

Peace. Preach and embody Peace. The disciples were sent out on a mission that was in every way to reflect Jesus' own message, and that message was peace, the shalom of God.

Peace is promised and the sacred is near. If we are preparing to go out and change the world, then this is possible only when we know ourselves to be receivers of peace. We need peace in ourselves, in our hearts, in our lives and that includes the peace of living more simply.

Jesus told his disciples to say: "*Peace to this house.*" So let us hear that message to us at Pitt Street Uniting Church this morning, "*Peace be with you. Peace be with us.*"

There is a spiritual depth to human life that is available to us, that is in our own hearts if only we could be still, and brave, for a moment to sense it. As children of the one that Jesus called Abba, this peace is already with us.

This is a peace that conquers fears and reveals visions of a new self and a new society, and when we can touch it, we want it not just for ourselves but also for our family and friends, neighbours and community, city and nation, and for all the world.

May peace be with you.

May peace be in our world.