

In our church magazine, Insights, Rev Elizabeth Raine also gives us some uncomfortable thoughts to reflect on in her commentary: "Surely this is calling us to a sacrificial way of being, where we go beyond ourselves and our own needs and comforts. Jesus call us to live our lives in line with our beliefs, to let our works be seen".

Our reading's message for this week stirs the conscience, when we acknowledge how many people in our world are homeless, cold, hungry, lonely, lost, and disturbed. Can we do better?

A song to sing or to read: When I needed a neighbour TiS-629

When I needed a neighbour, were you there, were you there?
When I needed a neighbour, were you there?

Refrain

*And the creed and the colour and the name won't matter
were you there?*

I was hungry and thirsty were you there, were you there?
I was hungry and thirsty, were you there? *Refrain*

I was cold, I was naked, were you there, were you there?
I was cold, I was naked, were you there? *Refrain*

When I needed a shelter, were you there, were you there?
When I needed a shelter, were you there? *Refrain*

When I needed a healer, were you there, were you there?
When I needed a healer, were you there? *Refrain*

When they put me in prison, were you there, were you there?
When they put me in prison, were you there? *Refrain*

Wherever you travel, I'll be there, I'll be there
Wherever you travel, I'll be there. *Refrain*

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With thanks to Brian Turrell for preparing today's reflection



Church in a Bag
Sunday 30 August

Dubbo Uniting Church



A Gathering

Lord of our lives, as each of us come to worship in the privacy of our homes, we are conscious of our need to pause and pray and reflect on how much we need you, O God, spirit of love and wholeness. And we recall the words of the song, You Raise Me Up:

*When I am down and, oh my soul, so weary
When troubles come and my heart burdened be
Then, I am still and wait here in the silence
Until you come and sit a while with me.*

May we experience the presence of God and be raised up this morning as we share Church in a Bag.



Preparation

In the words of the hymn we pray:
*Help us, O Lord, to learn truths your word implants
To study that your laws may be inscribed upon our hearts.*

*Help us, O Lord, to live the faith which we proclaim
That all our thoughts and words and deeds may glorify your name.*

As we pray these words we ask for strength and guidance to accept the challenge your message has for us this day - a challenge to forget ourselves and think of the needs of others. O God, are we up to the task to share, to give, to love, to reach out to those less fortunate than ourselves? Forgive us when we put ourselves first, when complacency and indifference rule our lives, when we fail to live out our faith in practical ways.

Amen



Reading: Matthew 16:21-28

Reflection

Our Gospel reading gives us much to reflect on. In the preceding passage as they made their way to the territory near the town of Caesarea Philippi, north of Galilee, Jesus has asked his disciples “Who do people say that the Son of Man is?”.

Peter’s reply indicates that he has been with Jesus long enough, seen his healings and heard his teachings to be able to say, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God”.

Having heard Peter’s acknowledgement, Jesus thus believes the disciples are ready to accept and understand that his Messiahship means suffering and death. And so our passage begins with “From that time on Jesus began to say plainly to his disciples, I must go to Jerusalem and suffer much from the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the Law ... and be put to death ...”.

Jesus’ announcement causes Peter’s rebuke of Jesus: “God forbid it Lord. That must never happen to you!”. Peter’s reply indicates that he has failed to understand fully what Jesus was about. He has failed to understand Jesus’ leadership as one of being Servant. He cannot accept that the Messiah, the Son of God, can be put to death. Did Peter have in mind the Jewish belief in the Messiah being king or High Priest? King from the Davidic line? One expected to save the Jewish nation, restore Israel and usher in the Kingdom of God?

Peter in his rebuke of Jesus is saying ‘Listen Lord, you do not have to be bossed around by the elders and chief priests. You are the Son of God; the Messiah’. In doing so, Peter is promoting the common values of the time about power and worth. He is not espousing God’s values. So Jesus said, “Get away from me, Satan”.

At the beginning of his ministry, as Jesus prepared himself for his mission, he faced temptation on how to go about fulfilling his task and he was tempted to use the spectacular means, popular appeal such as turning stones into bread. Now Jesus is having to prepare himself again – this time to confront Jerusalem, the religious leaders, and the Cross.



Yet he is again being tempted to stay away from Jerusalem and the Cross. Jesus knows that he has to push that temptation aside and try again to teach the disciples the way of selflessness, service, humility, and commitment that will mean giving up home and family and facing rejection. In doing so they are preparing themselves to carry on after he has gone.

Verses 24 to 28 are challenging and confronting: “If anyone wants to come with me, he must forget himself and follow me ... and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”. What does Jesus mean by the phrases ‘forget himself’ and ‘lose one’s life’?

I suggest the answer can be found in the Beatitudes: Blessed are those who are humble; Happy are those whose greatest desire is to do what God requires; Happy are those who are merciful to others; Happy are those who work for peace. Jesus calls the disciples/us to be humble, to not having any sense of being more important than others. Be merciful to others. That is, care about others, not just oneself. Make your greatest desire to do what God requires – love one another. Make our focus one of being part of humanity and respect all whatever their colour, race, beliefs, gender. However, we don’t have to stop caring about ourselves. The commandment – we are to love our neighbour as we love ourselves – makes that clear with ‘as we love ourselves’.

In living caringly, compassionately, in seeking to help others and in putting ourselves out to help others we shall find the true meaning of life; of what it is to be human. And so come to know our true being. A life of true worth, not one based on superficial, material values and status.

Interestingly, the Rev Dr W Loader, in his commentary on this passage, made the point that Matthew is saying “Ultimately we are judged not by our status nor even by whether we are ‘Christian’, but solely by the reality of our performance (a common Matthean theme v27) - and then he will reward each one according to his deeds”.

Verse 27 is very sobering and confronting, particularly when we read Matthew 25: 31-46 “I was hungry but you would not feed me When did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or ... and did not help you?”.