

## Sermon - Inspired to Learn to Harvest

- The reading from the Old Testament, from the book Exodus, has a particular relevance for us as Christians, and as members of the church in the Surf Coast.
- The story of Exodus is about a people journeying - journeying from oppression and slavery, journeying through a variety of adventures and dangers, journeying towards a land of promise.
- It is an iconic story, that symbolises - or represents - many stories of faith journeys, whereby people journey in themselves from a place of darkness and despair, through times of testing and trial, towards a destination of fulfilled hope.
- And in today's reading God speaks to Moses, and invites the Israelites to be followers of the way of God.
- God says to Moses: You have seen how I have rescued you. Well, now if you choose to follow my way, then I will choose you to be my people.
- Listen to the words that are written about this conversation:

*Now therefore, if you obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples. Indeed, the whole earth is mine, but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.*

- *'If you obey my voice and keep my covenant'* - that is the invitation;
- *'you shall be my treasured possession out of all the peoples'* - that is the reward. It is reminding us that we can be special to God;
- *'Indeed, the whole earth is mine'* - this is the context: just a reminder that we all belong to God whether we choose to acknowledge and honour him or not. In that sense everyone is special to God, but God invites us to be extra special!;
- *'but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation'* - aha! Being extra special does carry some responsibilities. The promise is both of reward and responsibility.
- Now this call and invitation was originally for the Israelites, and thus the Jews.
- But through the ministry of Jesus, through the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and through the work of the early church, we have come to recognise that this call and invitation applies to us too, as the inheritors

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of the word of God, as inheritors of the promises made to the first responders to God.

- So '*If you obey my voice and keep my covenant*' - this invitation is for us. In fact, by being baptised Christians, it is understood that we have already signed up to this.
- '*but you shall be for me a priestly kingdom and a holy nation*' - this reward and responsibility applies to us as well.
- As the Church, as the Body of Christ, as Christians - we are to be a priestly kingdom and a holy nation.
- Not as an earthly nation. Not as Australians and immigrants. But as members of God's kingdom and the nation of Christ-followers.
- So what does it mean to be a priestly kingdom, and a holy nation?
- Does it mean that we should all become ordained priests, and act like we are members of a religious order, like nuns and monks?
- We are talking about the whole Church - everyone in it - every single woman and man.
- Well, clearly this did not happen for the Israelites, and no-one had any issues about that - so maybe it meant something a bit different.
- I think it helps to look at the underlying meaning of the words.
- A priest is supposed to represent the people to God, and represent God to the people - *present* the people to God, and *present* God to the people.
- This role is not supposed to be one of being the go-between, or of blocking access, or preventing others from being able to approach God by themselves.
- Rather, it is meant to *facilitate* access, of helping to make the connection between people and God.
- It is a bit like when I and a Eucharistic Assistant administer the bread and wine - we are not *preventing* people from making their personal communion with God. No - we are *facilitating* communion between people and God.
- So being called to be a priestly kingdom is about being called to facilitate other people's relationship with God - to enable it, to make it easier.
- And to be a holy nation?

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- Well, to be made holy is to be set aside for a special purpose.
- In the same way that a wine chalice is made holy - is set aside to serve a special purpose, that is, the purpose of enabling communion.
- So God calls and invites people to have the special reward and responsibility of being holy: set aside for special purpose - and priestly: facilitating people's relationship with God.
- Which leads into today's Gospel story:
- When Jesus sees the crowds '*harassed and helpless*' - presumably with the cares of life and the indifference of political systems, or economic systems, or governmental systems - Jesus has compassion on them.
- And so he calls a motley collection of individuals: fishermen, tax-collectors, retirees, agitators and misfits - and he sets them aside to serve a special purpose (that is he makes them holy), and then sends them out to facilitate a fresh relationship between people and God (that is he gives them priestly responsibilities.)
- He sends his disciples out to *bring* the good news of God's kingdom to the people, and to *be* the good news to them.
- And this is what evangelism is about.
- This is what mission is about.
- This is what being a disciple is about.
- This is what being a Christian - a follower of Christ - is about.
- This is what we are about.
- So how do we do this? Do we put money in the collection plate and have fund-raising initiatives so that we can hire a professional to do it for us?
- Or do we ask this question seriously for ourselves - how do we *bring* the good news of God's kingdom to the people: how do we *be* the good news to them?
- And it is not as though we do not already have some understanding of how to do that today.
- After all, look at how we are doing this through the marvellous program of Mainly Music.

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- Parents and carers bring their young children along, not just for entertainment, but to be encouraged in their parent/child relationships, and to join in a growing support network of parishioners and participants.
- Here is just one way where we are both *bringing* and *being* the Good News for the wider community.
- But there is need for so much more.
- When we look around the Surf Coast, Australia, and the world, and we see so much need for the love and peace of God, for the insight and enlightenment of Jesus, for the life and wisdom of the Spirit - we can see the need plainly, because the harvest is plentiful.
- So there are further ways that we have not yet started to explore.
- Can we hear the call of God, through Jesus, calling us as disciples to labour in this harvest? - to engage with both the reward and the responsibility of being a priestly kingdom and a holy nation, knowing what that means.
- And when we do acknowledge this call, are we prepared to be honest and, say '*I don't know how to do this effectively*' or '*I don't know how else to do this effectively*', not in order to reject the call, but as a starting point to learning?
- Jesus calls us deeper into his life-giving ministry.
- What is your response to God?

Let us pray:

God of Moses, God of the Israelites, God of the first disciples:  
we hear your call through Jesus to continue his ministry,  
to bring your Good News to our community,  
and to be the Good News to them.

Encourage us to respond - to open ourselves  
to learning how to embrace the rewards and responsibilities  
more deeply in our daily lives.

We pray this through the same Jesus Christ our Lord,  
who is the way, the truth, and the life. Amen.