

## **The Grace of Letting Go**

Sermon preached at St Stephen's Uniting Church, Macquarie Street, Sydney 5<sup>th</sup> July 2015 by Rev Ross Smith. Lectionary Readings: 2 Samuel 5:1-5, 9-10; Psalm 48; 2 Corinthians 12:2-10; Mark 6:1-13.

When I was weighing up my life choices as a teenager, the professions that attracted me most were those that I saw as designed to be helping professions, such as social work, teaching, counselling and being a pastor. There are many other helping professions, doctors, nurses and nowadays people who do mentoring.

The church is also an agency one among many, which seeks to help troubled people. A good helper has to have qualities of patience and to be a good listener and responder, to have determination and commitment. It's not easy work.

Scott Peck writes that “People who come to psychotherapy do so saying they want to change, and then from the moment therapy starts they usually begin acting as if the last thing on God's earth they want to do is change.”

Jesus sends out 12 disciples to do this tough work: work that parallels exactly the mission of Jesus as outlined in Mark 1 – proclaim repentance, exorcise demons, heal the sick. They are to go out without any props, but they must have total commitment.

We in the church know that we are called to be ready and willing to be of service at any time and in every way possible. Sometimes we think we don't have the skills or knowledge or the answers to the challenges that are thrown up in the midst of our mission, but we do at least know that Jesus had confidence in his disciples despite their doubts. We believe he has confidence in us despite our feelings of inadequacy and experiences of failure.

However, there is a surprising saying in this context: “If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.”

That doesn't sound like the Jesus who risks all to find the lost sheep, or the father who eagerly awaits the return of the prodigal!

“Shake off the dust! Move on!

Sometimes we think faithfulness is a matter of persisting, hanging in, trying further, taking every possible step. But perhaps here we are hearing of a different type of faithfulness, the faithfulness of letting go. Sometimes the loving, the faithful thing is to let go and move on.

That is a hard thing to do, especially if you see yourself as one determined to help, determined to convey the necessary word or to do that thing that will finally break down the barriers.

We are supposed to bring the good news. To reach people. But now we are told to let go?

Jesus in this context is a realist. He knows there is a tough world out there. There will be rejection, seed will fall on bad ground, the invitation to come to the banquet will be refused, There will be beatings. There will be some who come and turn away like the rich young ruler.

Jesus' own death shows us the “reject-ability” of his message. If he experienced rejection, why should we expect anything different?

If we expect to be always successful in our efforts we may soon come to realise that we do not possess more powers than Jesus had. His home crowd didn't want to give him a hearing. He had to leave, move on.

There is grace in going to great lengths to help people. There is also a grace in knowing when to let go. A parent must let his or her adult child make his or her own way without feeling responsible for whatever choices or actions that adult makes or does. That time of responsibility is over. Accept it!

There is a time to leave off guiding and instructing someone in a task or job and seeing them make their own best fist of it. Sometimes we learn something useful from someone who has taken their own steps which are different from the ones we would have taken!

Sometimes, we have to let go so that God can come. We have to leave it to God. We trust God to be God and to turn our efforts into something fruitful.

After we have tried our best to be faithful, in our friendships, our relationships with offspring, our witness to the word of life, we can say, "That's it! I've done all I can do, Now let God take you."

What we are doing in letting go is to give God space to come and our allow ourselves to move on to other fields, other challenges. We are not able to solve all human problems.

One of the things we do in the communion service is to take our life and our problems, our failures and heartaches, and lay them on the altar. We bring our brokenness, our poured-out-ness. We offer up to God what we by ourselves cannot do, cannot fix. We let go and let God.

Let us, this Sunday, do that. Offer ourselves upon the altar. As we do let us ask ourselves this question: "Is there anything, anyone, some situation, some problem for which I need to shake the dust off my feet and let go?"

Give God your commitment, your dedication, your sacrifice – but also offer up your failures. Like the disciples we proclaimed repentance, exorcised demons, healed the sick. Now we let God take and use what we have offered.

We went out without any props, but had total commitment. We were called to be helpers. But now we offer up our efforts. We do so, believing that God, in God's own good time and good grace, can transform even rejection into a marvellous work of love.