

Vicar's Letter #14: 21 August, 2020

When the going gets tough....

Dear Parishioners

How disappointing it is to be back at Covid Alert Level 2 and 3! Despite Ashley Bloomfield's advice that the question of having another outbreak of Covid-19 in Aotearoa/New Zealand was "not if but when", I think most of us just didn't want to let that thought settle into our awareness. It was too discouraging and scary. And yet, here we are - all of us coping with this unwanted reality.

One of the things that struck me, when the Alert Level was announced last week, was the number of people who were saying that they didn't believe that our country could continue to go up and down the alert levels like this. People had had enough - more than enough - the first time! While I understood the disappointment and discouragement, I thought that this was not nearly as resilient as we need to be - and actually are - as a nation. When the going gets tough, the tough get going.

You can think of any number of examples from normal life. I think of the parent who gets up to soothe a sick and crying child for a sixth time in the night, even though the parent is worried, stressed and totally exhausted. Where do they get the strength to do that? It is there all along. It's just that they haven't normally needed to access it (thank goodness). You would be surprised at what a person can do when called upon to meet a big challenge. In fact, when faced with big challenges, we often surprise ourselves!!

One way of speaking of this type of action is to talk of sacrifice. For a season, the parent sacrifices time and energy and their own well-being to offer something even more important - love and nurture and consistent attention and presence to their child.

This sort of sacrifice is actually written into our DNA as human beings. But alarmingly, it seems so out of keeping with contemporary attitudes and media comment that it now seems almost counter-cultural. But we, as Christians, know something about sacrifice, because we have Christ's example of sacrifice for humanity as the foundation of our lives. We are people who commit ourselves to Christ's way, and sacrifice - acting for the good of others at one's own expense - is part of following Christ's way.

The "team of 5 million" concept incorporates the principle of sacrifice. We do what is good for the team, even if it inconveniences us individually. Not everyone on the team of 5 million will do that, of course, but it is possible for us as Christians to keep following that path of sacrifice during the first, second and subsequent lockdowns, because our lives are lived not just for ourselves, but for God and for others.

This Sunday our epistle reading comes from Romans chapter 12. It begins, "I appeal to you therefore, brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God...." It has been a long time since our nation has shared in such a national and international emergency as this, when sacrifice for the community good has been understood as valuable and praiseworthy. This pandemic is an opportunity for us to live out our calling as Christ-followers for the good of our community and our country, and show by example how liberating and life-giving the best sort of sacrifice can be.

With my warm greetings in Christ.

Peter Bengel

Vicar
(Anglican Parish of Lower Hutt)