

Sermon at St Aidan's and St Philip's - August 12, 2007.

Has God ever spoken to you? Have you ever heard God speak to you? While walking in Paris many years ago, we approached the Place de Concorde – it was traffic chaos, no lights, no designated pedestrian crossing. (We had almost lost Betty earlier to an irate Parisian motorist as she looked to the right instead of the left!) Well, at the Place de Concorde I saw others crossing, so I bravely stepped off the kerb. But after a couple of meters I got frightened as cars sped towards me, and I began to run. A voice boomed out “Stop!” I stopped immediately and stood petrified in the middle of the road. Then the same voice said “Keep walking!” With my eyes transfixed on the Egyptian obelisk on the island in the centre of the intersection, I walked to that oasis trying to ignore the cars zooming around me. I don't know who saved my life, but in my heart, I believe it was “God”.

You never know when God will interrupt your everyday life and ask you to act in a way that will make something extraordinary happen. Take Abram for example - a faithful man, minding his own business, and a lucrative one it was – God told Abram to take everything – family, herds, tents – and go to foreign land. God chose Abram because of his faith in God, and because of that faith in God, Abram went. Again, because of his faith, God promised Abram, now Abraham and his wife Sarah, that they would be parents in their old age. Because of Abraham's faith in God, it happened. In the Letter to the Hebrews we heard of people who had great faith in God, and because of that faith, they were called by God to do extraordinary things.

I'd like to share two stories with you that give an idea of how God can surprise us and open us up to the Kingdom of God, all without warning.

A few years ago I wanted to do something extraordinary for God, and kept looking for the right moment – at church, with family, at the Office where I worked. Then one day:

1. Young man on the Crowded train

One day I was on a packed train – people were standing – squashed in doorways - there was just one seat left opposite me by the window. A young lad in army camouflage pants, a big coat and with a hat pulled down

over his ears plonked down on that seat. I tried to avoid eye contact and put my head further into my book.

“*G’day*” he said.

I felt obliged to look up and said “*Hi*” and quickly put my head straight back into the book.

“*Good book?*”

“*Mmmm*” I mumbled. (I wished he’d stop talking to me – I had study notes to read!)

“*What’s it about?*”

By this time whole carriage of people was silent but I could feel everyone was listening – all waiting to hear what my book was about! In my heart I cried out silently to God “Why now? Why here?”

I said to the young man “*It’s about planning Church Services*”

The silence was deafening, but it didn’t deter the young man from asking the obvious – “*Are you a minister?*” “*What church do you go to?*” “*What’s it like?*” etc etc.

I failed miserably as an advertising agent for the Anglican Church, I am sure. But then he talked to me about how his life had been turned around through contact with the Church of Christ in Blackburn. He described how his life of abuse, drugs, homelessness, alcohol, depression and everything else, had been turned around by the faith of a minister there who took time to talk to him, got him a gardening job around the church grounds, and became his friend. This young man’s growing faith was slowly transforming his life.

As he left the train he said to me “Nice talk’n to ya – ‘ave a good life”.

I went home feeling like a real wimp. I had blown my chance to do something extraordinary for God. I hadn’t influenced anyone in that crowded carriage to follow Christ.

But then I realised that God had used me to allow that young man to do the influencing, to open the eyes of people in the train to show them how their lives could be changed if they followed Christ. He gave them a glimpse into the Kingdom of God.

The second story is about

1. Cath the taxi driver

My daughter came home yesterday bursting with a story to tell. She'd had a night out with the girls from work, and caught a taxi home. The driver was a woman aged 40-50 named Cath. Kirsty chatted to her, commenting that she had a "gutsy job, a woman driving taxis in Melbourne. It turns out that Cath is the only female driver in the City.

Cath said she enjoyed it "Like being at home on my sofa – my music on, people to talk to, Jesus in the back seat...

Kirsty thought "Y-e-a-h r-i-g-h-t!" "Jesus is right here, beside me?"

(Uh-oh – loopy lady!)

"No, really!" said Kath who'd become a Born-again Christian seven years ago. "He's turned my life around".

Cath told her story, how she picks up all kinds of people who others won't touch, homeless, lost, down and outers.

One night she came across a 19 year old lad lying in the gutter (around the same age as her younger son) – he looked like he needed help. She told him to get into the taxi, where he burst into tears. He explained how no-one would help him, after he'd been bashed up, and thrown out of a nightclub by two bouncers. Cath took him to hospital stayed with him – it turned out the boy had two broken wrists.

She's careful, sizing up people before accepting them into her cab – she has four rules:

No alcohol, no swearing, no violence, no smoking.

She doesn't give her surname to people, but if a kid really looks like they need a friend, she

gives her mobile phone number them with the invitation to give her a call if they are in trouble.

Kirsty was amazed at such passion and commitment shown by Cath.

Because she was listening so intently to Cath's story, Kirsty missed a turn-off, they got lost, and the journey cost an extra \$10 – but it didn't matter. Cath the taxi driver was someone who engaged Kirsty by talking about her faith in Jesus, which impelled her to do something for the marginalised people of Melbourne. For some of those people, the Kingdom of God began in that taxi.

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In Luke's Gospel, Jesus was talking to his disciples as they walked through the countryside. He speaks to them with great tenderness – “Do not be afraid, Little Flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” The kingdom is God's gift to them and to us – all we have to do is accept God's love, and try to live our lives as Jesus taught us.

Earlier on the journey, Jesus had told the disciples not to worry about material things, saying that if they put their faith in God, and followed his teachings, the things that mattered would be provided for them. He told them how the birds of the air and the flowers of the field were provided for by God, and that God who loves us so much will provide for us too. God promises his kingdom to us – as it was for Abraham and Sarah, Moses, Joseph and all the faithful since then. All we need to do is to put God first in our lives and as we said in our Psalm today – learn to do good, seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow. We have a real opportunity to make a difference in the world today by following those words, and, by responding to the Micah challenge, part of the **MAKEPOVERTYHISTORY** campaign : On some churches you will see the banner -

: ...what does the LORD require of you? To do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8)

The Son of Man is coming at an unexpected hour as the Gospel says. We need to be sensitive to God's presence in our daily lives. We must be alert to that call which could come at any time and in any context. And we, as Christians, have faith that the Holy Spirit will lead us into God's kingdom here on earth. By reading the Bible, praying, and following Jesus and his teachings we will learn to worry less about things that aren't important, and concentrate on those treasures in our lives which will make a

difference to people we meet as we share the Good News of Jesus Christ which leads us to the Kingdom of God.

Amen

Preached by Anne Kennedy