**St Andrew’s on The Terrace Sunday 18 June 2017 Pentecost 2 Refugee Sunday and Disability Sunday**

**Hebrew Bible 2 Samuel 9: 1-13 David and Mephibosheth**

9 David asked, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?” 2Now there was a servant of Saul’s household named Ziba. They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?” “At your service,” he replied. 3The king asked, “Is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God’s kindness?” Ziba answered the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet.” 4“Where is he?” the king asked. Ziba answered, “He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.”

5So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel. 6When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, “Mephibosheth!” “At your service,” he replied. 7“Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.” 8Mephibosheth bowed down and said, “What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?”

9Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul’s steward, and said to him, “I have given your master’s grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. 10You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master’s grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table.” (Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.) 11Then Ziba said to the king, “Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do.” So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table like one of the king’s sons. 2Mephibosheth had a young son named Mika, and all the members of Ziba’s household were servants of Mephibosheth. 13And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king’s table; he was lame in both feet.

**Reflection One: Jenny Simpson**

I have two stories of disability and faith.

**First one:** I read the daily Taize bible readings, and one last week was Acts 3:1-10. It concerns a man, lame from birth, who was brought to the temple as Peter and John arrived. He had been carried to beg for alms. Peter said to him "I have no silver and gold but I give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk". And he raises him up to his feet.

Always the story is about the man, healed, walking and leaping, and the apostles, but -but, what about the background people who carried him every day to seek alms?   What about the family at home who had cared for him? What if the healing story is seen for them too? The relief of their burden? What if disability is realised to be a burden carried by others too, that it is at a cost, a great loss of their hopes too? What about them? They are real and often overlooked or their role called saintly but they are human and have dreams and agonies too. They are Veronica and they are Simon of Cyrene and they are Jesus too. And they get tired and worn out, and sometimes they get little rest.  I know many of you help carry the pallet for someone and I hope someone can carry you when you need it too.

**The second is about grace and the beyond:** With MS, my life has become smaller and diminished, as aspects of myself came off.  When I could no longer do active things , I thought I'd work and study more, when I couldn't work and study failed because of mental fatigue, I thought I will do voluntary work. When I couldn't do that due to poor mobility, I thought I will be a really sociable person, but I hadn't much to talk about. Then I thought I will become spiritually developed, but then I really learned about ego.

I thought I will look to the great saints like St Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross, for they tell you the steps. And also Pema Chodron a Buddhist nun - how to be a bodhisattva.  But I read their steps and knew I could not achieve their greatness. Then I stumbled on, or the book found me, *The Cloud of Unknowing.*

The unknown monk said, "lift up your heart to the Lord with a gentle stirring of love, desiring him for his own sake and not for his gifts." (Please remember he is writing mid 1400's.) And "Love is the highest cognitive power, far superior to the powers of reason and intellect".  And "love will not mislead you." And "For Jesus can well be loved, but cannot be thought."  And "For love may reach God in this life but knowledge may not." And he is not saying throw away your intellect, but it has its limits, and the heart will take beyond.

And I felt so relieved, for my mind has its limits, yet grace comes again and again.  When at my wit’s end, grace comes. As Anne Lamott says, "Grace always bats last."

What I realised is my little mind wanted some success somewhere. Man, if it wasn't visible as worthy work, I would do perfect interior stuff! Over and over I have had to learn to let go, strip away, shrug off, scour off. And forget the mastery of anything. Then grace comes, and again Anne Lamott quotes "the Gulf Stream will flow through a straw as long as it is aligned and not at cross purposes". And Merton "the next step is not a step ... That apparently the small entity that is you, disappears .... Into love dwelling in Love.

There are billions of ways home. But I think loss of something defining, like physical or cognitive function is being one for me.

**The Gospel Matthew 2:9-23**

9After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

**The Escape to Egypt** 13When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. “Get up,” he said, “take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him.” 14So he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, 15where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: “Out of Egypt I called my son.” 16When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. 17Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled:

18“A voice is heard in Ramah,/weeping and great mourning,/ Rachel weeping for her children/ and refusing to be comforted, / because they are no more.”

**The Return to Nazareth** 19After Herod died, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt 20and said, “Get up, take the child and his mother and go to the land of Israel, for those who were trying to take the child’s life are dead.” 21So he got up, took the child and his mother and went to the land of Israel. 22But when he heard that Archelaus was reigning in Judea in place of his father Herod, he was afraid to go there. Having been warned in a dream, he withdrew to the district of Galilee, 23and he went and lived in a town called Nazareth. So was fulfilled what was said through the prophets, that he would be called a Nazarene.

**Reflection Two: Sonia Groes Petrie**

This Gospel reading was used for our reflections on our New Year’s service this year and it feels very relevant to revisit it for Refugee Sunday. We recognise the desperation of refugees fleeing from places like Syria today with that of Mary, Joseph and Jesus fleeing to Egypt. Regardless of whether these events in Matthew’s gospel are ‘historical’ the reality is that this has always happened and is still happening all around us. … innocent people suffer in our world as a result of human pride, greed, fear and hate every day. Tragically, the actions of Herod are nothing less than common.

As I reflected on our gospel reading this week my thoughts turned to a remarkable woman I know, Pani Thomas, who lives Alexandra in Central Otago. I got to know Pani when I lived in Alexandra as she is the wife of a work colleague I was working with at NIWA. She came to New Zealand from Cambodia as a sponsored refugee in 1987. She is a talented dress-maker, and was always warm and welcoming towards me. We enjoyed walks and conversations together but she didn’t share much of her past. Then when I was living here in Wellington in 2011 she sent me a copy of her story that she had just published with writer (and her neighbour) Pauline Cartwright, called Still Alive: A Survivor’s Story (it was read as a serial book on Radio NZ and is still available on their website to listen to). As I read I was so shocked at what she had endured but knew I could not truly understand what she had been through. In hard labour camps from 1975-1979, she lost her husband and 3 children and almost all of her extended family. She then spent 8 years trying to rebuild her live, the last 2 years of that in a refugee camp before coming to New Zealand as a sponsored refugee in 1987. I re-read the beginning of her story this week and what struck me was how quickly she and her fellow citizens went from the daily lives they knew to being thrown out of their homes and forced into the countryside for hard labour. From one day hearing on the radio the Khmer Rouge had taken the capital Phnom Penh to later than same day soldiers on tanks in their town telling people to get out of their houses. All freedom and everything that was familiar to them taken away almost instantly. Pani’s story and experiences sadly are not unique. There are over 65 million refugees in the world today. A mass of humanity on the move because of persecution.

I know there are many of you who have been much more involved than me in resettling and supporting refugees in our community and advocating for NZ to increase its refugee quota. This morning I’ll reflect on the work of Christian World Service supporting Syrian refugees in Jordan and Lebanon. Syria may have faded from our new headlines but life there is still extremely hard. Since last year, there is a ceasefire but life inside and outside Syria remains extremely difficult. Nearly half of the 13.5 million people affected have fled the country. Inside Syria the United Nations and agencies like the ACT Alliance are finding it difficult to deliver humanitarian supplies. Outside of Syria the refugees are struggling to keep going on very limited rations and with little support. “Life here is difficult. We lack clean water and when we go to the toilets there are a lot of people and we have to wait in line. I fetch water for my mum and there is always fighting going on”, says Raghad. Ali’s father runs a small café and according to the ACT Alliance staff, Ali works in the café instead of going to school. Ali says, he spends his days playing with friends. “I’m bored. The toilets are dirty and the kitchens are crowded. I awake early and eat breakfast, then I play with my friends. We live six persons in one tent.” (From Za’atari refugee camp, northern Jordan.)

CWS (Christian World Service), which is the development agency of NZ churches works with the Department of Service to Palestinian Refugees of the Middle East Council of Churches to support Syrian refugees. DSPR was set up by Palestinian Christians determined to help Palestinians of all religions made homeless in 1949. Working in Jordan and Lebanon, they struggle to meet the many needs of Syrian and Palestinian refugees. They have decades of experience and the networks necessary to mobilise support from the host communities. DSPR provides emergency food parcels and cash vouchers, healthcare, education, children’s fun activities and emotional support. Their staff work with the utmost compassion to give refugees support that is more than the rations or medicine. They have set up self-help groups so refugees learn from and support each other. By working with refugees who have been there for decades and the newer arrivals from Syria, they ease the tensions created by the scarcity of help and build stronger communities. As members of the DSPR team say “There are realities we all share, regardless of our nationality, language or individual tastes. As we need food, so we need emotional support, love and kindness and appreciation”

Last year CWS ran a fundraiser called Operation Refugee to raise funds for DSPR which I took part in and many of you supported. The challenge was to have five days of eating the same rations as a Syrian refugee - chickpeas, lentils, rice, salt, fish, flour and oil. I did find it a challenge. I enjoy variety in my diet and not being able to eat what I wanted and feeling a bit less energetic made me appreciate what I take for granted. What it made me realise too was it is not just a lack of food that makes life for refugees challenging, it is a loss of freedom and the barriers that are put in their way – language, different education curriculums, lack of access to affordable healthcare and employment opportunities. With your generous support and along with 71 other people we raised $42,000. Trish Murray, CWS International Programmes co-ordinator wrote this week “I have just returned from Jordan and Lebanon where DSPR is making a real difference in the lives of refugees. Seeing the enthusiasm of children back at school and participating in Children's Forum was a real sign of hope for the future. Operation Refugee and your participation will keep this hope alive”.

I think there is value in these fundraisers in not only raising awareness and money but also giving hope to refugees that we are with them. Emotional support and connection is as vital as practical aid. We share the same world and we are all connected. In choosing to follow Jesus, we are challenged to live out God’s radical hospitality in Aotearoa New Zealand and in the wider world. Let us work together in whatever ways we can, supporting initiatives like CWS Operation Refugee, helping resettle refugees in our communities and advocating for increases to our refugee quota and ways to reduce the barriers to enable refugees to fully participate in their new lives. As Pauline MacKay, CWS Director says “every one of the 65.3 million refugees has a story & dreams for the future”.

**The Gospel John 14: 15-21** 15If you love me, you will keep my commandments. 16And I will pray to God, who shall give you another Comforter, who may be with you for ever, 17*even* the Spirit of truth: whom the world cannot receive; for the world cannot see the Spirit or know the Spirit: you know the Spirit who abides with you and shall be in you. 18I will not leave you desolate: I come unto you. 19Yet a little while, and the world sees me no more; but you see me:

**Reflection Three: Susan Jones**

Today we’ve heard something of the experience of being disabled and of being exiled from home from two of many perspectives. Each person’s story is unique, each story, individual.

The experience of being disabled is life altering. The experience of being dislocated is a world altering experience. Each has the potential to leave us alienated, beaten and despairing. All of us have experiences, maybe not disablement or dislocation, which rock our world and we fear they will leave us desolate.

Jesus looked into the eyes of his disciples as he prepared to leave them and saw something of that desolation; fear of the future. He promises them the Spirit and says deliberately and, I could imagine, slowly. “I will not leave you desolate.” Whatever our circumstances we are not alone. Debra Lampshire, who won the ACC supreme Attitude Award in 2016, was confined in mental hospital for 17 years. She still hears voices, yet now a teaching fellow at Auckland University she teaches her compassionate method for helping the mentally ill take control of their lives. She echoed Jesus’ words when she spoke to Judy Bailey after the awards last year. Judy writes:

Now she [Debra] is teaching others about the road to recovery. What does she tell people? “That you’re never alone. Even in the darkest depths, know deep in yourself that this is endurable. … Her advice to practitioners: “If you don’t believe that I can get well, then I can’t believe it. You are the person who has my back. “Never underestimate the power of love, never underestimate your ability to impact the lives of others…”

We are not alone: the Spirit is with us; We are not alone: this community surrounds us; We are not alone: we have within us the ideal companion – ourselves; We are not alone: others have walked this path before us; We are not alone: there are those who walk this path alongside us today; We are not alone: We are not left desolate.

Susan Jones 027 321 4870 04 909 9612 minister@standrews.org.nz