

St Andrew's on The Terrace Sunday 14 October 2018 Pentecost 21

Readings for the Gathering Hebrew Bible: Genesis 32:22-32 Jacob Wrestles With God

²² That night Jacob got up and took his two wives, his two female servants and his eleven sons and crossed the ford of the Jabbok. ²³ After he had sent them across the stream, he sent over all his possessions. ²⁴ So Jacob was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak. ²⁵ When the man saw that he could not overpower him, he touched the socket of Jacob's hip so that his hip was wrenched as he wrestled with the man. ²⁶ Then the man said, "Let me go, for it is daybreak." But Jacob replied, "I will not let you go unless you bless me." ²⁷ The man asked him, "What is your name?" "Jacob," he answered. ²⁸ Then the man said, "Your name will no longer be Jacob, but Israel,^[a] because you have struggled with God and with humans and have overcome." ²⁹ Jacob said, "Please tell me your name." But he replied, "Why do you ask my name?" Then he blessed him there. ³⁰ So Jacob called the place Peniel,^[b] saying, "It is because I saw God face to face, and yet my life was spared." ³¹ The sun rose above him as he passed Peniel,^[c] and he was limping because of his hip.

The Gospel Jesus Calls His First Disciples

Luke 5:1-11

5 One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret,^[a] the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. ² He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." ⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." ⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Contemporary reading

From Spirituality Today: Reclaiming the Buried Life

by David Tacey, La Trobe University, addressing National Council of Priests of Australia, Parramatta NSW July 14th 2010 <https://www.associationofcatholicpriests.ie/2011/09/spirituality-today-reclaiming-the-buried-life-david-treacy/> These are spiritual dark ages, and a new style of religion has to be found. The task of religion is far more difficult today: it has to lead people within themselves, into their heart lives, to find that part of them that is capable of developing faith. The head or intellect has pushed faith away, with its belief that it can get on well without it. The role of religion in dark times is to draw faith out from people, and not instil it into them, from above. This involves us in the art or science of spiritual education, noting that 'education' derives from the Latin *educare*, meaning to lead out or draw forth. This is how religion needs to be conducted today, if it is to make sense and to gain existential purchase on people's lives. The light of the divine is lost in the darkness of the human interior, and we have to be prepared to go in there, make contact with it, and lead it out. Religion that operates in the old-style, imposing itself from above, will no longer work, and if we persist in that style, the religious traditions are doomed. Opening up to the interior person is the future of religion and the tradition that can achieve this first is the one that will be assured of a strong and noble future. Reappropriating the mystical traditions, monastic techniques and styles, and pathways of interiority and contemplation, is the way ahead.

The Reflection for the Gathering

Attached to the written scripts of this reflection which are at the back of the church is a four-page summary of the decisions taken by the General Assembly. I'm happy to talk with anyone about what they mean over lunch today or during the week when we could make a time to talk together. I wrote in the e news about the proposal which this parish sent in and that comment is included in the reflection script also. Briefly, it failed, but 80 books have made their way out into the church; taken probably by individuals more motivated to read them and do something with them than might otherwise have been the case. It's a win-win if you look at it from a 'left-handed' power perspective.¹

¹ He [Robert Farrar Capon] then defines left-handed power as, "power that looks for all the world like weakness." But it is the power that Jesus vests his kingdom as the dying, rising and disappearing Messiah. And yet he warns us that we all prefer right-hand power. "Every one of us would rather chose the right-handed logicalities of theology over the left-handed mystery of faith. Any day of the week—and twice on Sundays, often enough—we will labor with might and main to take the only thing that can

Our proposal in the area of glbt issues was to promote study and discussion of 'Changing our Mind' by Prof David Gushee. Gushee is an US evangelical whose sister's coming out forced him to re-think a lifetime of teaching and preaching. Our proposal was left till last. People were tired at the end of what was mostly a positive Assembly experience. It seemed there was therefore no will to enter a vigorous debate and it was lost decisively (about a third voting for) with very low affect in the room. We had come with 70 donated books and another 10 back in Wellington. Before I left the stage I offered free books to those who wanted them. There was quite a rush! Within an hour, by the end of dinner, 78 books had been either taken or ordered. It made me think of how President Trump exited the Paris climate accord but US businesses continued work combatting climate change. Though the official word was 'No', there are many people, conservative and open, prepared to read and study in this area. The most surprising people came to get a book and talked of running study groups. Also, the brief debate had identified individuals. I was told of several conversations arising as a result – and was part of some myself.²

David Tacey writes: "Religion that operates in the old-style, imposing itself from above, will no longer work, and if we persist in that style, the religious traditions are doomed." There was a moment in the opening Assembly worship when I felt a particular incompatibility with the gathering of people. We might have been singing "To God be the glory, great things he has done" or it might have been another moment. It was the 'old-style religion' of which Tacey writes. I didn't feel in that moment that it was imposing itself from above, but I did get a clear picture of the church collectively reaching out to an external God, believing that all the holiness, all the glory and all the sacredness which we were about was outside of themselves. Later during Presbytery reports we heard a lot about how the decline in Presbyterian church numbers; how that decline was working out at the grassroots with difficult decisions about numbers and churches and earthquake strengthening costs, aging congregations and relative absence of the young within our churches. Yet, that did not seem to be being connected with in any constructive way – not through our doctrine group or any missional groups or church strategy – except yet another round of restructuring at the national church level. Then in the final chapel service at the end of an Assembly where we had again collectively voted to ignore a group which has been asking for admittance for 27 years, we sang with full throat and I am sure in most cases full hearts: "Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God Almighty" and "Bless the Lord, O my soul... for he has done great things, bless his holy name." I tried not to believe those singing felt that one of the great things God had done that Assembly was to again exclude the lgbt community, but the music sounded to me peculiarly like a victory song after an emphatic rugby defeat.

Each time I felt personally we as church were getting it wrong and in fact had been getting it wrong for centuries. Tacey goes on to say: "The task of religion is far more difficult today: it has to lead people within themselves, into their heart lives, to find that part of them that is capable of developing faith. The head or intellect has pushed faith away, with its belief that it can get on well without it. The role of religion in dark times is to draw faith out from people, and not instil it into them, from above." That is the experience Jacob had that dark night of waiting before he was to meet his brother Esau after decades apart. He encounters this stranger and they wrestle; an internal struggle in the dark night of the soul. Jacob persists until the blessing of the struggle comes. We all need to be struggling and wrestling with that within us which will lead us to what we call God – a struggle so immense for Jacob it warranted a change of name; our identities are so changed by such encounters. Some within the church have pushed faith away thinking it was a juvenile, childish activity that has no place in a sophisticated world view. In doing so we further starve our spirits of what they need to be vital and life giving. Not only have we, in the past, committed the mistake of taking the Bible literally, now intellectually, we are guilty of consigning it to the rubbish heap.

I wondered in the final worship service if we were enjoying singing with so many voices and such a good band to such a powerful God *because* we knew at heart that things were not going well. That whatever we were offering, generations since the baby boomers were not buying; that our market research had led us in the wrong direction; that somehow what had satisfied our grandparents wasn't cutting it anymore. Maybe those singing felt the God (who apparently had done great things) would come to the rescue again. If we looked outside of ourselves, we might not be confronted with how we might be part of the issue. Again Tacey's words

save anyone and reduce it to a set of theological club rules designed to exclude almost every one."

<https://www.lifestream.org/the-joy-and-freedom-of-left-handed-power/>

² <http://www.standrews.org.nz/weekly-newsletter-for-friday-12th-october/>

might help. “The light of the divine is lost in the darkness of the human interior, and we have to be prepared to go in there, make contact with it, and lead it out.” It is a very uncomfortable project to look within, to brave the darkness of our shadow selves. And besides, like the disciples who have been fishing all night, we are tired, tired of trying with ever-diminishing results. To be told to try again on the other side of the boat is almost the last straw. Yet that is what the church needs to do – try another way, look in a different direction, inwards instead of outwards. When our view is interior we will solve the mystery of how we relate to the Other. We will find in ourselves what it is that we fear from those strange other people who are not like us, who do not act the same way we do, who do not like church in the format we have devised over centuries, who live a different lifestyle or value different aspects of life. For we will find within ourselves everything we fear. Instead of projecting those fears on to others whom we then exclude, we stand a chance of integrating our own fears, developing an understanding of ourselves. Then we are free and open in welcoming others into our spaces or, even more daring, are brave enough to venture into *their* space to sample their world, their way of doing things so we can be partners on the interior journey.

Reading further into David Tacey’s work as an antidote to the week at Assembly, I had another epiphany. You will be familiar with the terms Feminine and Masculine written with capital letters at the beginning. There is the Feminine, capital F in all of us male and female and trans people. There is also the Masculine (capital M) in all of us. Each aspect of a person helps them achieve different modes of being. The Masculine in women helps them achieve in the world in leadership and organisations. The Feminine in men and women supplies a receptivity, the creativity and compassion which our world needs to be human. Without the Feminine we are all bossy autocratic and domineering, with the Masculine we become wishy washy and may become doormats. Each is needed for an integrated person. Also the Feminine plays a particular role in helping the soul and spirit to work together. Without it they remain separate and we are fragmented beings. It suddenly struck me sometime during the confusing time which was Assembly that the church does not want to include the gay community because it is a community which embraces both the Masculine and Feminine sides of our psyche. It is not that the church is specifically afraid of lgbt women and men and trans and gender fluid people, but that it is afraid of the Feminine which will demand of us a more interior Christian journey. I would also gently suggest that progressives can fall into this trap also. We are cautious of the inner journey too. Not to preserve a literal faith, but to preserve our status within an Enlightenment society. We like to be known as rational, as thinkers, as intellectuals. Letting that reputation go, we might fear, could leave us in an unreflected, pious state worse than before Enlightenment, progressive Christianity.

Let me suggest therefore that we practice the interiority we will need if our religion is going to make it with discerning younger generations. Take the final hymn in our order of service. I invite you to focus on one of the metaphors – perhaps the fire, or the snow or the choir which ever. Reflect first of all on your resistance to that metaphor – how you might *not* want to be a voice in a choir or a snowflake in snow and so on – ponder why that might be..... Now think about how you would like to be a finger on a hand or a grape on a vine or a thread on a loom with others making the cloth together.... Ponder *that* feeling for a few moments..... Take what you have learned about yourself in those short moments with you for further contemplation during the week. May we, though many, be one. May that indeed be so. AMEN

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SUMMARY OF DECISIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2018



Moderator Installed

Rev Fakaofu Kaio was installed as the Moderator for 2018-2020 in a special service at the Centennial Chapel, Christchurch.

Memorial minutes

Assembly today approved that Memorial Minutes for 19 ministers be placed in the records of the Assembly.

Ordination anniversaries

Assembly acknowledged ordination anniversaries and the Moderator extended congratulations to all those who will celebrate these milestones before GA20.

Moderator-Designate

Rev Hamish Galloway was announced as the Moderator-Designate. He will be Moderator of the General Assembly for the period 2020-2022.

Supplementary Provisions ratified

Updates to the Conditions of Service Manual and the Code of Ethics, which were issued in March 2018, were ratified by General Assembly.

General Assembly accounts

Assembly received the audited accounts for the year ending 30 June 2018. The Council of Assembly was authorised to sign the audited accounts on behalf of General Assembly.

Book of Order changes – Chapter 15 discipline

Assembly adopted changes to the chapter 15 (Discipline) of the Book of Order.

Assembly was advised that these changes were required urgently and the Book of Order Advisory Committee advised of its intention to bring comprehensive changes to this chapter to the 2020 GA.

Book of Order changes

A range of technical corrections to the Book of Order were approved by General Assembly.

Assembly adopted under special legislative procedure, changes to chapter 8 (Presbytery), chapter 5 (Congregation), chapter 10 (Ministry Settlement and Termination), chapter 14 (Meetings of Church in Assembly).

Assembly agreed that a variety of changes to the Book of Order be accepted and remitted to presbyteries and church councils under special legislative procedure.

Assembly adopted some changes to the Book of Order as interim provisions having force until next GA

Moderator election process

Assembly agreed to a revised process for the election of the Moderator of General Assembly:

Church councils will be invited to submit up to four suitable nominees to their presbytery or synod.

Signed permission of the nominees must accompany the nomination. Church councils are responsible for including a 150-word statement about their candidates' wider church experience and suitability for office.

From the nominations of church councils within its bounds, each presbytery or synod will nominate two candidates for the position of Moderator Designate of General Assembly.

Presbytery nominations are then sent to the Assembly Executive Secretary for inclusion on a ballot paper.

A preferential voting system will be used. Church councils vote for four candidates, in order of preference.

Votes will be counted by the Assembly Executive Secretary, and overseen by a Justice of the Peace.

For full details of the new election process, see the General Assembly minutes.

Mission Enterprise Fund exemption clause

Assembly approved a change to Supplementary Provisions that address an anomaly in the exemption clause for contribution to the Mission Enterprise Fund.

The revised wording clarifies that manse sale proceeds used to fund a new worship centre do qualify for the exemption, and vice versa.

Under previous rules, a parish could only be exempt from contributing 10 percent of the net sale proceeds of a parish property to the Mission Enterprise Fund (MEF) if a manse was being sold to replace a manse, or a worship centre sold to replace a worship centre.

Assembly noted that some parishes have been unfairly disadvantaged by the inequity of the exemption clause and recommended to PressGo that it make grants to parishes, in line with the spirit and intent of the revised exemption clause. Parishes must apply by 31 May 2019 if they believe they are eligible.

Moderator's role

Assembly agreed that:

the term of a Moderator's office remain as two years

the position of Moderator be up to full-time

any person who has already served a term as Moderator is ineligible for nomination

in the six months prior to taking office, the Moderator-Designate can be supported on a .33FTE basis to allow preparation and orientation time for the office.

The Moderator be encouraged to establish a support group to support him/her for the duration of their term

Allowance be made for the spouse or other support person to accompany the Moderator when travelling.

Stipend-based remuneration be negotiated with the incoming Moderator.

Assembly agreed that the key tasks for the Moderator be:

Moderator of the General Assembly

Ceremonial and celebration – the Moderator is to represent the Church at significant national and international gatherings and participate in ecumenical joint statements where appropriate
Mission – listen and share the missional direction of the Church with its members and encourage mission at all levels within the Church.

Pastoral presence – be a pastor at large and be a voice of encouragement to the Church
Contribute to policy formulation.

National Committees

Assembly approved national church committees, work groups & nationally appointed bodies.

Pacific Presbytery

General Assembly affirmed a change of name from Pacific Islands Synod to Pacific Presbytery.

Assembly approved changes to the Book of Order to give effect to the name change.

Presbyterian Support NZ

Assembly encouraged presbyteries and congregations to continue to engage in joint activities with Presbyterian Support and PresCare in their areas.

Assembly asked the Council of Assembly to consider continuing to support, in the next budget round, the Church's annual contributions to the New Zealand Council of Christian Social Services and PresCare.

Social Voice Task Group

Assembly acknowledged its understanding of "social voice" to mean both words and action used and expressed in engaging with, and addressing, the social issues of the day.

Assembly asked the Moderator to form close working relationships with the heads of other organisations with a social voice, and be alert to the possibility of joint or complementary statements on issues of the day.

Assembly encouraged presbyteries to engage with the social voice report and to identify and support networking opportunities in their regions.

Code of Ethics

Assembly commended the Code of Ethics and the work the committee has done.

Assembly asked Council of Assembly to establish a workgroup to develop ways for ministers, employees and volunteers working in the church to have regular engagement with the Code through things like discussion, training, education, orientation and induction processes, profile on the Church's website, and inclusion in contracts and supervision agreements.

In response to concerns about the financial liabilities faced by church officers under the Health and Safety at Work Act (2015) and the relative liabilities of volunteer workers under the Act, Assembly asked that the matter be referred to the Council of Assembly with a view to raising risk awareness.

InterChurch Bioethics

Assembly agreed that presbyteries and national groups be encouraged to invite the InterChurch Bioethics Council and Enquiring Minds to lead discussion of bioethics issues at regional gatherings.

Church property commission

Assembly approved the members of the Commission that deals with matters referred to it by the Church property trustees and matters related to the relevant Act.

Care for Creation

Assembly committed to reducing our impact on the environment, acknowledging the important role Christians play in being stewards of God's creation.

That this Assembly endorse the list of achievable and measurable actions aimed at reducing our collective impact on the environment.

That this list of actions be sent to every church council, church school and social service agency with a connection to the Presbyterian Church for implementation.

Assembly asked every church council to report on the progress of implementation of the actions through their annual report to presbytery (and their parish review).

Assembly also agreed to expand the list of actions in section five of proposal to include:

Reduce transport-related atmospheric carbon inputs by encouraging participation in local congregations and sharing together in the revelations of congregations.

Promotion of cycling by providing cycle stands at churches.

Use church land (or make it available to community groups) for community gardens and/or restoration plantings.

Presbyterian Women

Assembly agreed to support and actively encourage each presbytery to institute a quick and agile process to facilitate participation in civil democracy through submissions on public issues including parliamentary bills and statutory enquiries.

Assembly agreed to review Book of Order regulation 8.9 (1) (f) in light of changing structures of Presbyterian Women.

Assembly agreed that presbytery membership regulations in the Book of Order be amended to allow “at least two representatives of PWANZ chosen by the executive of that organisation to represent them”.

Accra Confession

Assembly commended the Accra Confession to congregations and presbyteries for study.

Co-operative Ventures

General Assembly ratified amendments to sections 2-7 of Procedures for Co-operative Ventures (2012).

Assembly agreed that the current UCANZ Partner Support Fund be terminated at the end of June 2019 and financial assessments from 1 July 2019 be compulsory.

The General Assembly request the UCANZ standing committee to undertake a review of those arrangements by July 2023.

Euthanasia

General Assembly declared it does not support provision for euthanasia and assisted suicide as proposed in the End of Life Choice Bill.

Grounds given are that legally sanctioned provision for doctors to actively end people’s lives is ethically unacceptable and endangers public safety.

General Assembly urges:

Parliament to respect the dignity and value of all human lives, to stringently protect society’s most vulnerable, and not to pass the End of Life Choice Bill.

Government to significantly increase spending for palliative, hospice, mental health, disability and elderly services.

These resolutions be communicated to the church at large, MPs and to media.

General Assembly referred the Doctrine Core Group’s report on euthanasia to church councils and congregations for study.

General Assembly urges presbyteries and church councils to renew ministry to the aged and vulnerable and to explore ways to contribute financially to palliative, hospice, mental health, disability and elderly care. The government is urged to do likewise.

Peace on Korean Peninsula

General Assembly expressed its support for all steps made towards peace on the Korean peninsula by all parties involved around the world, especially North and South Korea.

Assembly asked that a prayer for peace be formulated and distributed to all congregations, to pray together as a body of Christ for peace on the Korean peninsula.

That General Assembly affirms our belief in God, who reconciled us to Him through Jesus Christ, and who calls us to be peacemakers, can also bring peace to the painfully persisting conflict on the Korean peninsula to enable reconciliation and restoration between two countries of one people.

Youth Commissioners

In relation to commissioners for General Assembly, Assembly agreed that the term “youth commissioner” be changed to “young adult commissioner”.

Te Reo Commissioner

Assembly agreed to appoint a Te Reo Commissioner to promote and extend the use of Te Reo Maori within the Church, especially by facilitating the provision of liturgical material.

Diversity in leadership

Assembly declined to uphold a proposal which asked for the book *Changing our Minds* by Prof David Gushee to be made available to all parishes, and for parishes to be urged to take up study wherever possible with neighbouring parishes of differing viewpoints.

Westminster confession

Assembly approved that several statements within the *Westminster Confession of Faith* be seen in their historical context, not in the light of today’s better respect and stronger relationships between the PCANZ and the Catholic Church.

The new website reference is: The historic *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646) is one of the subordinate standards of PCANZ, along with the contemporary *Kupu Whakapono* (2010).

Assembly decisions

For full details of all Assembly decisions, check out the Assembly minutes which will be published on the website in November. Videos and images are available for download on the Church’s website along with daily news summaries and other useful information from Assembly.