

Year A Trinity 1 OS Gospel Matthew 7

Last Monday, on our Queens Birthday holiday, the list of new honours in the Order of Australia was released. Like many of you I guess, I have always had some uncertainty about the basis on which honours are awarded. I looked up the criteria and it says very simply they are for outstanding service and achievement. Interestingly enough, in that order and conjointly. At a glance, there still seems to be an overrepresentation of men and a preponderance of achievement over service. Lots and lots of university academics appear, researchers, the law, medicine, and public servants. In other words people who are paid for their service and funded for their achievement. Another interesting category are former politicians, awarded for “service to Parliament!”.

One of the aspects of the process that I was aware of, is that any one can nominate a potential recipient. All you need to do is write a letter to the Secretariat with the nominees’ details. Simple as that. A Council scrutinises all the nominations assessed by the Secretariat and the Governor General signs off on their recommendations. No involvement by politicians or other public servants. So if there is a gender imbalance its up to us to rectify it. Who do you know who is deserving of an award? Write that letter. Not everyone nomination is successful, but the responsibility starts with us.

One of the aspects of the whole honour system that I always find intriguing is whether being paid to do something qualifies as service. In the light of our recent experience with the devastating bushfires I would have thought that members of the CFA in Victoria and the RFS in NSW would have featured prominently this time round but

perhaps too early in the cycle of awards to tell. I shall watch with interest next January.

I think it was Nikos Kazantzakis who wrote: “God is a potter. He works with mud.” I have always found it encouraging that this God of the Bible does the unlikely, not just with people of outstanding gifts (like Isaiah who was a learned adviser at the court of the King, or later, Paul who was extremely well educated with a brilliant intellect) but also with ordinary people. God works with common clay; mud like us.

You don’t have to be a genius or a saint to be used by God for the blessing of this world. The God who achieves the unlikely, often uses very flawed material with which to work. Again too many of the stories we preachers sometimes extol as role models for the Christian life, come from people of outstanding gifts and mighty faith. They are the names the world hears about. The greater saints. They use their considerable gifts to achieve great things for the glory of God. That is wonderful. But how can we identify with them? We are not in their league!

Over the long years of the last century into this, I have heard sermonic anecdotes of well-known Christians, held up as examples. They include names like Edith Cavell, Albert Schweitzer, Helen Keller, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, William Temple, Martin Luther King, Billy Graham, John XXIII, Helda Camara, Desmond Tutu. Or from within Australia: Caroline Chisholm, Daisy Bates, John Flynn, Mary McKillop, Alfred Traeger, Eileen Joyce, Weary Dunlop, Betty Cuthbert, Neville Bonner.

But what about the unsung Christians? The humble and unsung saints? That wonderful band of ordinary lay people who maintain

parishes through good times and hard, and who are often found to be key workers in community welfare and social justice agencies. They never make a headline, or even rate a mention in the small print. But that are God's genuine children! Throughout my ministry I have met them, worked beside them, and been humbled and inspired by what they manage to do for the glory of God.

Also what about the host of ordinary ministers and priests who are never elevated to high office in the church, and never serve in one of the so-called "top parishes." These to me are a great inspiration in my life, for they with either limited gifts or (in many cases) underutilised gifts, are used by God to achieve the unlikely in a myriad of crucial ways.

Among the ordinary Christians who have inspired me have also been those who have had acute emotional 'hang ups', idiosyncrasies, glaring inadequacies, or limited intellectual ability, yet they have been a blessing to others.

I delight in the paradox that the God who calls some to be a chosen people does to seem very "choosey" in the type of people that are chosen. Such is the God of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Rachel. Without being in the least anti-Semitic, I can repeat the old two-liner with a lot of enthusiasm:

"How odd of God
to choose the Jews."

This quirky way in which God appears to work, reaches its zenith in the Gospel stories. Today we read from Matthew how Jesus selected twelve key disciples:

First Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas and

Matthew the tax collector; James the son of Alphaeus, and Thadaeus; Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot who betrayed him.

How odd! There does not appear to be one university graduate, or scholar, or priest, or town councillor, or village rabbi, or upper class dignitary among them. They are a rabble of nobodies. Without in way wanting to insult to fisher people, but I think it can be fairly said that they are not a very pious breed, yet the first four choices were fishermen. And before long there was a greedy thug who collected taxes for the Roman occupying authority whom we know as Matthew.

It was people like this to whom Jesus entrusted his Gospel. It was these nobodies to whom he gave "*authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity.*"

From Abraham to Amos to Jesus: the same God!

From Jesus to St Matthew to St Francis to William Booth and John Flynn: the same God!

From Sarah who gave birth when she was elderly and called her son "Laughter," to a teenage kid called Mary who bore the shame of an unexpected pregnancy, to the Bulgarian peasant woman who became Mother Theresa of Calcutta: We see the same God at work.

From Abraham to Jesus, and to that face you see in your mirror, the same God!

This same God calls even unlikely types like you and me to be the unlikely source of blessing to the world around us. Right?

