



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
3 Stanmore Bay Road,
Whangaparaoa, Auckland, N.Z.
www.ststephenswgp.org.nz

Sermon

God Calling

Jeremiah 1:4-13; 3 John ; Matthew 28:18-20

22nd September, 2013

The Revd Ian Hardcastle
© 2013

God calling

God calls: there is a general call to all us – the Great Commission. “Go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”

It is a call to the wider Church – the Church throughout the ages – to spread the gospel through all the world. There is a command to the greater Church which includes the local church which includes individual Christians.

Recently, we had a series of sermons on witnessing and our homegroups have studied and practised some of those skills. This is a part of our response to the call.

Do you notice that there is a reassurance which goes with the command? “Surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” Your efforts to tell people the good news about Jesus are an obedient response to the Great Commission. When you feel afraid, inadequate or silly, remember Jesus promised to be with you even as you obey this command.

That is a general call. Jeremiah had a specific call – a call to speak God’s messages to Israel and the surrounding nations at that time. It was a specific task for a particular time.

We have a call to support Overseas Missions. We have a specific focus on Kondoia Diocese for these three years. It seems to me that it is a God-given call. Now three of us have received a very specific call to visit Kondoia and speak at a Renewal Conference for the Diocesan Clergy.

How did this come about?

In April Helen and I had been thinking seriously of taking an overseas holiday to celebrate our 25th Wedding Anniversary. So our thoughts were already turned overseas. Then in May, I preached from the set readings on the start of Paul’s second missionary journey and how as they moved through Turkey, they were twice redirected by the Holy Spirit until they had got to the North-western coast at Troy and were wondering where they should go. Then Paul had a dream of a Macedonian man calling to him, “Come over and help us!” And so the gospel broke into Europe. I preached on some principles of guidance.

That week, as I tidied my papers, I came across an Alpha brochure which used that incident (the Macedonian call) to ask people to help in Indonesia. As I read it there was a strong inner witness that God was talking to me. I contacted Alpha to discuss our going – but nothing came of it.

Soon afterwards, I found another mission organisation's magazine with an A4 page devoted to the same words and the invitation to help in Jerusalem. Again, I knew that inner sense that the Spirit was addressing me. Indonesia? Jerusalem? Then I knew it wasn't either; it was the principle of the call. I prayed, "Lord, I know you are calling us to go somewhere – but where?" Two days later, an email arrived from Given in Kondoa, saying,

"Yesterday I was thinking of you and thought if the Lord will open the door for you to visit us that would be real good. Robert from UK is expected to come to Kondoa this coming October and I was thinking you can join him."

I was amazed. When I showed it to Helen, she simply said, two days again I prayed that if God wanted us to go to Kondoa, he would get Given to ask us specifically!

Again, I had that confidence that God was calling us and had a peace about it.

What are we going to do?

Our travel plans (all God willing of course) are to leave NZ on Wednesday 16th Oct (3½ weeks) and fly to Bangkok for an overnight rest. Then onto Nairobi and so to Arusha in North Tanzania. A former pastor of Helen has established a mission base there and we will see them, their work and get over jet lag. Then we travel down to Kondoa – a 7 hour bumpy bus journey apparently.

Once there, all the church workers of the diocese are to come to the conference. A week is set aside, although some of that time is for assembling. Besides us, Given has invited two English vicars who to speak on reconciliation and discipleship. Then Given will take us to visit the villages where we have supported Christian work.

We leave Tanzania on 3rd November. Anne flies directly home. Helen and I have decided to add on a couple of weeks of holiday and we will return the other way around the world via America to catch up with some friends there, returning on 22nd November.

Someone has asked what is in place to look after the parish while we are away. Max Cranch is undergirding it all with Paul Huffam and Lorraine Lloyd sharing the load and three other guest preachers in the duration.

What is the point of the visit?

As I understand it from Given, we are to teach, minister to and encourage the local church leaders. This ministry is particularly to equip them to minister in the power of the Spirit. I expect that we will also learn about this mission field and be inspired ourselves by the experience.

Are we competent?

Frankly, the answer for me is, no – not in my own estimation. But I have to hold onto the call of God. Remember Jeremiah said to God:

"Ah, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am only a child." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a child.' You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,"

I am convinced God has called us to go. So why and how he uses us, is his business. Our task is to be available and trust that he is with us always and that he will rescue us if that is needed. We can trust that he is watching over his word to fulfil it.

God is Calling

A general call, a specific call, how else is God calling? Let's turn our attention to the 3rd Epistle of John. He was writing to a local church and commends them for their good treatment of travelling ministers.

I think there is a relevant word to us here. Take verse 3:

“It gave me great joy to have some brothers come and tell about your faithfulness to the truth and how you continue to walk in the truth.”

Compare that with Bishop Given’s words about St Stephen’s:

“St Stephen’s has moved us so much! It is simply because we can see God in their lives. It is not a big congregation or a wealthy congregation but their love for God and their neighbour in Africa brings to me the story of the Good Samaritan in a new way. It is the story being carried out by your lovely people. They do not know Kondo, they have never been there! but they know the wound of Kondo through their faith in the risen Lord! We really have no language to offer to them. But God will bless their lives. ... They hold firm the great commission ‘Go into the whole world and make all people my disciples’ and they hold firm the great commandment ‘love God and your neighbour as yourself.’”

Given talks of our supporting people we have never seen. If you have given money for those evangelists or toward a church roof – well done! Verse 5 says, “Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you.”

If you have given to support the Bishop in his ministry – well done! “[He] has told the church about your love.”

If I may change focus and reapply the text to our Short Term Mission, might we see a parallel between John writing to a church who were “to send the brothers on their way in a manner worthy of God,”¹ and your sending this little mission team on our way? This mission is not mine, Anne’s or Helen’s. It is ours as a church. We are your representatives. So how might you be involved?

You might choose to be committed to it. You might show that in prayer for us and for the Tanzanians. You might give to support the cost of the trip. You might offer encouragement and solidarity to us and them in this endeavour.

God is calling. He has called the Church to mission. He has called a few of us to visit the mission field. He is calling us here to be part of the work by commitment, prayer and giving.

All scriptural quotations are taken from the *Holy Bible: New International Version*® ©1972, 1978, 1984 by International Bible Societies. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House. All rights reserved.

¹ 3 John 1:6