

## **A Different Sermon ...**

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai, Sunday 16 October 2016

[MW16-29]

This morning I am going to do something I have only done twice before

- in nearly thirty years of ministry  
that is, I am not going to preach the sermon I had prepared for today
- I have what I think is a perfectly good sermon about the widow, the judge and prayer ... here it is (show notes)
- but the other day I really felt called to lay that aside and talk with you about something else

I sensed that there was a message from God, an inspiration from the Holy Spirit

- to reflect with you on this:  
as the people of Christ the King Mangawhai and the Mangawhai Mission District:  
where are we going and what are we doing?  
what is happening?  
what is God doing here?

Let me tell you, it's more than a bit scary to put down carefully prepared notes

- and go somewhere else  
but I said ok God, I'll give it a go and see where it leads
- so feeling somewhat nervous and also kind of excited  
I'll take a deep breath and off we go ...

Reflecting on all this the other afternoon I got a sense of the Lord saying to me

- and indeed to each one of us: "are you committed?"  
along with an encouragement to 'get real' with God
- a reminder that it is not about what I want or would like to do  
not even about what I think should be happening  
it is about getting real, down to earth and in line with God
- so I may have to look at our preaching topics for example  
and what I had planned to do  
and be open to what the Lord is doing
- what the Lord desires to teach us and encourage us with here  
to get on board with where the Lord is leading us ...

I am committed to being here, committed to the Mission District Project

- and above all committed to being the leader of this church community  
to celebrate God with us in Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit
- to enable us to be refreshed, equipped, renewed  
so that we are able to show and share the Good News of Jesus

I left a thriving parish in Motueka, where things were going well

- where some neat new things had started and were growing  
where in many ways it was safe, comfortable and secure
- to come here to Mangawhai and Wellsford  
where things are almost the exact opposite of safe, comfortable and secure
- because this is where God was calling me to be

I acknowledge and apologise for being somewhat distracted from this main calling

- there have been some good reasons, but whatever  
I am back on track  
and recognise my calling to be right here, right now

Please look around and wave to each other across the empty spaces

- these are the people we are called to be here with  
the reality is that in one sense we are kind of like a “house church”
- the good thing about this is it means we know each other  
we can easily notice when someone is not here and give our support
- and we are an incredibly well-resourced “house church”  
we have this wonderful building to worship in  
we have great facilities and the backing of a Diocese  
along with great neighbours next door in Wellsford

The down side is we are it ... this is us, however

- let me remind you of a promise that is given to all gatherings of God's people  
the promise is that within this group are all the gifts necessary  
for the building up of the body and sharing the Good News
- that is the promise: all that is needed is right here, in us and with us

So please look around – we are the supremely gifted people

- you are the supremely gifted person  
God is going to use to build up the life of our church  
and spread the love of God in Jesus Christ
- look around and see ... it is you, me, us  
everyone here is called, anointed, gifted by the Holy Spirit

At Synod Ann, Bernard and I were part of a discussion on the future of churches

- that included trying to work out what are the signs of “viability”  
and yes the number of people attending services  
the amount regularly given, are important
- but perhaps even more important than that is “vision”  
the vision, or lack of it, is the number one indicator of viability
- so what is our vision here ... ?  
I think we may have been more focussed on survival than vision  
concentrating on existing, hanging on
- maybe even held back by missing what we don't have  
like younger people, and children ...

Do you remember a story I shared with you about “vision” just after I arrived?

- this one *The Spyglass* by Richard Paul Evans (quote)

What is our vision ... ?

- the Pewsheet and letterhead for the Wellsford Mission District  
boldly proclaim: “A light to the world ...”  
their vision is to be a light for the community
- my previous parish in Motueka was known as Motueka Anglican Parish  
the initials are “M”, “A”, “P”, which rather fortuitously spells “map”  
so we designed a new logo building on this and incorporating the words:  
“giving direction for life”
- the aim of all our activities and programmes was to do just that:  
give direction for the life of our people and our wider community

What, if anything, are we boldly proclaiming?

- what is the aim of our activities and programmes  
for ourselves and our community ... ?

In a sense, here in the Mangawhai Mission District, we could carry on just as we are

- with our Sunday worship and weekday activities  
continue just what we are doing, as we have always done
- however I sense that we are called to be so much more  
we are not just a Sunday gathering  
we are more than a "weekend and holiday church"
- we have this great facility which is very well placed  
there are some things we do here during the week  
there are some community groups that use it
- yet there is even more opportunity  
for this building is closed far more than it is open

What is our vision ... ?

The cold, hard reality is that what we are doing, or not doing, here

- is being judged ... and I'm not talking about God, although that also is true  
I am referring to the Diocese, specifically Diocesan Council
- there are some things we have to do and show, some boxes we have to tick  
in order to get continuing support
- the good news is that if we are doing what I believe God is calling us to do  
all that will be taken care of

However it seems that what Diocesan Council will take careful note of

- is that we are making some progress with our funding  
and that above all we have vision, energy, enthusiasm  
that we show we are indeed "alive"!
- and the practical thing they are looking for is  
how we are "connecting with our community"

Fortunately we already have a head start on this

- we have our now well-established "Animal Blessing Service"  
no one else does this
- it is something we offer to our community: inviting and welcoming people in  
there are people who come to this who never come at any other time
- this is fantastic! and there is also a point of growth here: how can we build on that?

That service inspired me to consider ...

- could we do a special service reaching out to our community each term?  
four times a year, could we manage and sustain that?  
I thought we could and shared this at the Governing Body meeting
- and there was an encouraging response  
I had an idea for two other occasions:  
a service for volunteers, where we invite those who volunteer in the community  
to a special service, followed by a lunch that we provide;  
and a service for grandparents
- I asked for ideas and one more suggestion was a "Harvest Festival"  
that celebrates what is produced locally and is timed for local producers
- then after Garden Club on Thursday I was given yet another idea:  
that we choose a book of the Bible or a Bible story  
and invite the club to create floral displays based on this  
these would be on show during the week, with a celebration service on Sunday
- we could also look at having a service that involves all those community groups  
that use our facilities
- and there is the start of a "community craft group"

I remember reading an account of the dedication and opening service for this building

- the number of doors was highlighted  
and the speaker said this was to focus on looking out to the community
- we know that as a church we are about more than Sunday mornings  
we know God is not just in the church or only for church people
- God is active in our community, and calls us to be there too

So I invite you to spend a moment or two considering:

- what is God already doing right here, at our place ... ?  
there may be something we are not noticing or oblivious to  
perhaps there is something we need to build on, give more attention to
- it might be something completely new, out of left field  
and God is saying "catch up"  
we need to pay attention to "where is the Spirit blowing?" and focus on that
- please consider this on your own, or talk with others  
get up, walk around, sit somewhere else

[time to consider]

Anything anyone would like to share ...???

Make no mistake, it is initially going to be hard work

- I'm pulling no punches  
and I'm also assuring you that we are on the way to somewhere amazing
- we in this place have a unique calling and a particular ministry given by God  
no one else is going to do it for us, it is up to us who are here now
- God never said following him would be easy  
my experience is that God wants to make sure we are committed  
that we are serious
- so when we put in the work, step out in faith  
put our bodies and our time our and money where our words are  
then we will see something great beginning to happen
- but we do have to step out first ...

We are the people of God in this place

- I believe we have Good News to share with our community  
Good News of grace, forgiveness and new life  
which comes to us through God's love shown in Jesus Christ
- I believe God is calling us to be committed to being here and doing this  
I am committed to being here and doing that
- are you in?  
are you with me?
- think very carefully because it is going to take all of us  
and it is going to take some effort

The good news is that when we are committed to God

- committed to being together here as God's people  
committed to the mission that lies before us
- great things are going to happen

We've done some listening and thinking and talking and sharing

- let's just take a couple of minutes to be still and quiet  
and allow whatever happens to happen
- then I will conclude in prayer