

Sermon: 'This is what I hope you heard' Silvia Purdie

Sunday 6 December 2015, Final service, Milson Combined Church

Bible Readings: Isaiah 65:17-25

1 Corinthians 16:13-24

Idea 1: May no one feel unappreciated

Whenever I go to a funeral I always come away asking myself 'What do I want to be remembered for?' – don't you? I wonder what you would like to be remembered for.

For myself, I have decided that if I had to pick just one thing it would be this – when people remember me I want them to know that they were appreciated by me. I know there's heaps of stuff we've done these past 4 years, but the top priority for me has always been that each and every person who walks through those doors, or that I meet out and about, that each person stands a little taller because of how I treat them. The central desire of my ministry is to create a bubble of space around the people I meet in which they might experience themselves as special to God.

Of course, ministry is not that much about the Minister but far far more about who we are as a community. Milson's mission statement there on the wall says it, to be a community for Christ, in which people are welcomed in, built up and sent out. The heart of that is offering each other this thing we call 'appreciation'. And I have seen heaps and heaps of this here in these buildings, it is poured out on those who come for worship, those who come to dance around with preschoolers, or to play scrabble, or to work for badges at Girls Brigade. It's how we do community.

It's an expression, in our own unique Milson way, of Isaiah's vision in his old age, nearly at the end of his incredible work ... his vision of Jerusalem remade – and not just Jerusalem but the whole earth and the whole heavens even ... as God floods Isaiah with the most astonishing hope:

Isaiah 65:18

*But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create,
for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy.
I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people;*

Actually, we know how to do that here at Milson, to take delight in each other.

But it is not always straightforward, for different people feel appreciated in different ways. Some love to be praised whereas some people just feel embarrassed. Some love to sit and talk, while others just want to get on with the job. As we commit as a church family to ensuring that each person feels appreciated we grow our relational antennas to work out what works for each

one, and offer a hug or a word or a visit or a thank you or just give them another job to do! That's part of what Paul was on about when he talked about us each being different parts of the body.

My apology to you this morning is for the times when I got too wrapped up in my own agenda and busyness to take time for you, or when I barged on with what I wanted to do and pushed aside others. That's the problem with those of us who are prone to 'overfunctioning'; it can be disempowering, it can be hard to be around. Appreciating each other is not just saying thank you, it is also giving each person trust and space to get on with what it is that they do.

Paul sums up the heart of the matter in our reading today:

1 Corinthians 16:14. *Let all that you do be done in love. ...*

and verse 20: *Greet one another with a holy kiss.*

I love the over-the-top affection that pours through Paul's letters. Mixed with his high theology and practical teaching is warmth and love, praise for people and encouragement, building other people up.

So may no one feel unappreciated.

Song: A new commandment

Idea 2: The Bible is really interesting

God has given me a love of preaching. I'm just grateful that anyone might want to sit and listen to me, better yet when you talk back! And my main hope is that my own opinions about things – as fascinating and insightful as they might be! – don't get in the road. For the main thing we are here for is working out what this book here is saying. This is the Word continually alive and speaking through the Holy Spirit. This is the record of Jesus Christ, the man born in the manger and died on the cross. But also the eternal Word pre-existent from before time, glimpsed by the prophets, whose presence pulls through the Old Testament like a powerful magnetic current.

I hope that you have heard me say that the Bible is really interesting. I hope that together we have opened it up in fresh ways, so that the Spirit can burst into brain synapses and spark fresh insights and new connections and even challenge stuff we take for granted in our lives.

I'm a big naughty as a preacher, because I don't often read solid theological books or learned sermons by people who know more than me. Sometimes I do! But mostly in my preaching I try hardest to get to know who is talking here. I am big on the 'who'. I sit with the words and listen for the voice, I dare to build a relationship with that man who lived so so long ago.

So, it fascinates me when I read stuff like 1 Corinthians 16:21

I, Paul, write this greeting in my own hand.

The authors of the Bible give us these brief glimpses into the reality of them writing to us. What's with this then? Why didn't Paul write his own letters? Try for a second to step into that room with Paul, and this other person sitting there desperately scribbling away while Paul raves on. Imagine the poor writer having to keep interrupting Paul to get him to repeat something or time to catch up. Who was that unnamed scribe? Paul never says. Unless it's Timothy – he starts 2nd Corinthians that way.

But why didn't Paul write himself? He was certainly well enough educated. Perhaps he had a disability that gave him shakey writing. Or perhaps he just thought better out loud – like my husband; Paul was obviously a mad extrovert!

And Isaiah ... I've been talking this past month about this extraordinary prophet known only as 2nd Isaiah, the only prophet who never introduces himself, never tells us anything about himself, who picked up writing where Isaiah of Jerusalem finished off, starting Isaiah chapter 40 150 years later, in exile in Babylon. For me, the fact that we know nothing about him tells me a huge amount about him ... we know that he was a man more than any other man in tune with the heart of Jesus, committed to standing back and letting God speak to his people as directly as possible. More of an introvert then. And knowing him a little for me helps to bring the words he wrote alive ...
Isaiah 65:19-20

¹⁹ I will rejoice over Jerusalem and take delight in my people;

the sound of weeping and of crying will be heard in it no more.

²⁰ "Never again will there be in it an infant who lives but a few days,

or an old man who does not live out his years;

Can't you hear the echo of weeping carved deep into the author's soul, the sight of dead babies and executed old men? Doesn't this explode in our own reading the incredible contrast as this old prophet transforms his experiences of trauma with promise and hope and restoration!? For this is the work of the Spirit, to inspire afresh in every generation the grace and the truth of God.

Song: **E toru nga mea**

(unaccompanied)

Idea 3: Be still and know

I will be way over time at the rate I am going, so I won't spend long on this one.

I hope you heard from me an encouragement for your relating to God in your everyday lives and your everyday praying. I hope you heard from me an emphasis on the process by which God shapes us and forms his life in us.

This gets us to Isaiah's beautiful promise to you and to me:

Isaiah 65:24

*Before they call I will answer;
while they are still speaking I will hear.*

I read in scripture and I experience in my own life the invitation to grow in faith, which is also growing in maturity, which flows outward in growing in ministry and service but it is fed by growing inwardly by growing in our ability to sit still with God.

Our theme for Advent 2 is PEACE. Surely this vision of Isaiah's is the most powerful picture of peace ever written

65:25

*The wolf and the lamb will feed together,
and the lion will eat straw like the ox,
and dust will be the serpent's food.*

*They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain,"
says the LORD.*

Our growing in personal maturity and deepening in faith expresses this at a spiritual, emotional level ... we can know in our own hearts the wolf and the lamb resting together

Over these past four years God has worked hard on me on the inside. I have been through some deep places. I have fought with my own wolves and lions. And I have sat with people in this room as they have grappled with their own fears and hurts. And together we have walked with determination to trust in the living God, to trust into an experience of peace, even when we're not feeling it. I hope you have heard from me trust that Jesus Christ is Lord, that he has purpose for our lives that pulls us through hard places and ultimately leads to this holy mountain, where the wolf and the lamb feed together and the whole earth resounds with praise – and peace.

Song: **Be still and know that I am God** (2 verses)

Idea 4: Give it a go

Our reading from Corinthians today includes Paul putting in a good word for some friends of his, the first family of the Corinth mission, Stephanus's house church. Paul affirms their leadership and those who have joined their team.

Then he uses 2 very powerful verbs in describing what these people do:

1 Cor 16:16

everyone who joins in the work and labours at it

The verb for 'joining in the work' is 'synergeo' – synergy, people coming together to be more together than they are apart.

Then Paul adds a 2nd verb, however – 'labour at it'. This is a tough one, it means 'toil', to work really really hard, to the point of exhaustion.

You know me, you know I work hard, and you know that I look for points of synergy so that together we might accomplish far more than any of us could alone.

But, what kind of work do you think Paul is talking about here? What is our work as church?

I want to suggest this morning as I close that the work that is worth working at is the work of building relationships. And we do that here at Milson.

Through our outreach programmes, through our pastoral care and community events we work at getting to know people, and through our contact with them sharing our faith and fellowship, Christ alive here and now.

I wanted to finish by saying something about mission, but I think I have probably said enough. I just want to congratulate the folks here at Milson for your commitment and generosity to reach out, to not be content to be a cosy club. I called this section 'Give it a go', for my conviction is that mission in our time and place has to involve experimenting and creativity. So I encourage you in your synergy, your together-work, and I encourage you to work hard at mission. It is worth it!

Our song for this part is a favourite of ours here at Milson, 'For I'm building a people of power'. And we will take up an offering, as a sign of our participation in the mission of this crazy thing we call church.

Sunday 6 December 2015, Milson Combined Church: Silvia's farewell

Theme: Peace be with you

Worship leader: Joanne

Preaching: Silvia

Readers: Minty, Jack, Alyse

Music: Liz

Laptop: Stuart

Welcomers: ?, Dorothy

Before the service: powerpoint of photos rolling over.

Children: mostly in, activity during

sermon for younger kids

Morning tea: Pam, Minty + team

Cleaning: Carrie, Minty

Set up: 70 chairs

Welcome

Song: **O come all ye faithful**

Advent Candle lighting + song (PEACE)

Prayer/reflection

Song: **Let there be peace inbetween us**

News & Notices

Birthdays

Song: **Calypso Carol**

Time with the children

Song: **Shine Shine**

Verse for the day: John 14:23

Jesus replied, "Anyone who loves me will live my word, and my Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."

Prayer for the day:

Living Word, we love you

Loving Lord, we honour you

Son of God, we welcome you

Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Solo: **Mary did you know**

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Sermon: *'This is what I hope you heard'*

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Song: **A new commandment**

Idea 2: The Bible is really interesting

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Idea 3: Be still and know

Song: **Be still and know that I am God**

Idea 4: Give it a go

Song and offering: **Building a people of power**

Prayer for the offering

Song: **Give thanks**

Prayers for others

Song: **O Little town of Bethlehem**

Blessing (song)

Song blessing (holding hands): **Now Unto Him**

Joanne

Liz (3 verses)

Joanne

Joanne

(3 verses)

Liz (3 verses + ch)

Ben & Jess (then children can go out)

Alyse

Jack & Minty

Silvia

(unaccompanied, just once)

(unaccompanied)

(unaccompanied, 2 verses)

262 (twice)

509 (1,1,2,2,1,2,finish)

Silvia

Liz (verses 1 & 2 only)

Silvia

