

Blessed to be a Blessing

Readings: Genesis 12:1-9, Acts: 1:6-11 & Rev 21:22-Rev 22:2

Introduction.

In 2000 the film “Pay it Forward” came out. This is an inspirational story of a social studies teacher who gives an assignment to his junior high school class to think of an idea to change the world for the better, then put it into action. One young student creates a plan for "paying forward" favours, that sets in motion an unprecedented wave of human kindness. I wonder what this would look like if we did this here?

But this idea of “being blessed to be a blessing” is not new – it is not something Hollywood discovered. It has been here all along in God’s plan – we call it “the mission of God”. This morning I want to unpack what God’s plan is for us and for Holy Trinity Richmond, by looking at 4 movements, as we live as part of God’s plan and pass on God’s blessing to those around us and to the nations.

Mission of God

God’s Plan:

If we start at the beginning of our Bible’s we read that God is the Creator, and we also know that God’s agenda for creation goes off track through human disobedience and wanting to have our own way. Then as we read through the first 11 chapter of Genesis the situation get steadily worse as disorder returns to creation. But then God calls a shepherd called Abraham. As Christopher Wright says,

The call of Abraham is the beginning of God’s answer to the evil of human hearts, the strife of the nations, and the groaning and brokenness of his whole creation. He is the beginning of the mission of God and the mission of God’s people (MoGP, pg 66).

In calling Abraham, God set on track His plan to continue the creation project and restore this broken world – it was God and God alone who could do this, and it started by God calling a 1 person and through Him, God making a people for Himself. As we heard from our reading from Genesis 12, in particular verses 1-3.

“Now the Lord said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation, and **I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.** I will bless those who bless you, and the ones who curses you I will curse; **and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.**”

God promised to bless Abraham, an old man with an old wife, and turn them into the beginning of God’s people, the nation of Israel– a promise repeated 5 times in Genesis 12-28 just to reinforce the point. But this blessing was not just for Abraham and his descendants – Abraham was blessed in order that all nations will be blessed. **Abraham was blessed to be a blessing.**

God’s blessing was to extend beyond Abraham and extend beyond Israel, so that all nations and people would be drawn to God. But Abraham had to respond, he had to take steps to have faith and obey, to leave and go.

God’s method.

Through Abraham, God’s blessing prevails over the curse of Genesis 3 and that brings us to God’s method of fulfilling the promise to Abraham– the coming of Jesus – God with us. Again to quote from Christopher Wright.

What God accomplished in Christ (the how) was nothing less than what God promised to Abraham (the what), to bring about the blessing of all nations on earth (MoGP, pg.75)

God's promise to Abraham was something only God could bring about – we call it grace. Only through Jesus can we enter into the blessing of eternal life with God – only through Jesus can we enter into the fullness of life with God.

God's message.

So how do we know of this blessing unless we are told? Well, as we move through the Gospels and into the Book of Acts, we read of God's message being spread, especially in the life of Paul – the Apostle to the Gentiles (see Rom 1:1-6). Paul took God's message of Jesus the Messiah, his life, death and resurrection to the nations, extending God's blessing to all.

As Paul writes in Galatians 3:14

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

If we put our faith in Jesus, we are entering the blessing that God gave to Abraham. We have been adopted into the people of God as Sons and Daughters. God's blessing now includes us the Church as the Body of Christ. But in entering into Abraham's blessing, we have also entered into Abraham's commission – **we are blessed to be a blessing to others**

We get a glimpse of what this looks like at the end of the Bible in the Book of Revelations. In chapter 21 and 22 we have a picture of the new heaven and the new earth – the fulfilment of God's plan, with God dwelling with his people. But who are these people?

And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. **The nations** will walk by its light... Rev 21:23.

Then forward to Rev 22:2 and the vision of the river flowing out from the throne of God:

On either side of the river is the tree of life with its 12 kinds of fruit, producing fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of **the nations**.

God's plan all along has had all nations in mind and we are now part of God's plan to bring his blessing to the nations.

Our Part in the Story:

If you have been counting you will have noticed I have so talked of 3 not four movements– the promise given to Abraham; God's fulfilment of the promise in Jesus, the spread of God's goodnews through Paul. The fourth is us – God's people, the Church!

So the key question for us is: "Who are we and what are we here for?"

- In Christ we are part of the family of Abraham
- In Christ we inherit Abraham's blessing
- In Christ we also inherit Abraham's mission, to go and be a blessing. This is the very command that Jesus gave his disciples.

As we heard in Acts 1:8, the message of Jesus has travelled from Jerusalem, through Judea, to Samaria, to Europe and England, and then to the ends of the earth – that is right here – to Aotearoa New Zealand, when 201 years ago this Christmas, CMS missionaries came from England..

But that does not mean God's mission has stopped –the message of Jesus continued and continues to be spread. In 1842, Bishop Selwyn was made the first Bishop of New Zealand,

and between 1847 to 1860 he spent 31 months, or 22% of his time on 10 trips to the Melanesian islands. His aim was to bring young men and women to St Andrews College in Kohimarama to learn the basic truths of Christianity and return home as evangelist. Today we know that place as Mission Bay in Auckland, and the training College is now the stone Café.

Then in 1861, in a world first, John Patteson was made a missionary Bishop and leader of the Melanesian mission – a role for which he gave his life in September 1871, after locals on an island in the Santa Cruz group of the Solomon Islands, mistakenly thought his arrival was connected with raiding slave traders. Others have followed in his footsteps since - including a Melanesian brother murdered in Papua New Guinea this September.

The response of Abraham is still our response - to believe and obey, to leave and go – **to be a blessing to others?** We may not all be called to be overseas missionaries, and there is certainly much to do here in our own town - we can be a blessing right here. But we can also be a blessing and support mission in other places - spreading that blessing further afield. In particular, the mission to Melanesia continues and as the Nelson Diocese, we have a connection with the Diocese of Malaita, in the Solomon Islands.

Recently as a Diocese we raised money to complete accommodation for Dr Jonathan Hicks and his family, as Jonathan takes up a role as NZCMS missionaries teaching theology in Malaita.

In 2013, just after Easter, I had the privilege to go to the Diocese of Malaita, located on the island of Malaita, the third biggest island in the Solomon Islands. This island has a population of approximately 35,000 people – 95% of which are subsistence farmers/fishermen, and there are still villages that have not accepted Christianity.

The trip from Honiara to Auki, the capital of Malaita, is a 3hr by boat (or 30 minutes by plane) that reminded me of crossing the Cook Strait.

My first impression approaching Auki (besides the heat and humidity) was how rugged the island looked with thick green forest and mountains running along its length.

As I soon discovered, transport is a major issue, with most roads being rough and unsealed, making driving slow, very bumpy, and in places dangerous (thankfully not where I was going).

Most people still lived in small villages on pole houses made of banana leaves.

The reasons for my trip was to visit the new “Trinity School of Theology and Ministry” (TSTM) located, 30min north of Auki. This school teaches certificate and diploma courses in theology and mission for lay people and those looking at ordination. Degree courses are taught at Bishop Patterson College in Honiara for clergy only. Bishop Sam’s vision is to develop a training school with an evangelical gospel focus, compared to the majority of Melanesian Anglicanism, which is very high Anglo-Catholic in practise because this is what they inherited from Bishops Selwyn and Patteson. Bishop Sam’s goal is to develop a more gospel-centred, expression of faith.

The students (all men at this point) come from a number of Dioceses for a 1 or 2-year programme, living in the single dormitory blocks (one for men and one for women). As well as theology, on the same site is training in, agricultural, automotive and women’s skills. The teachers also live on site, and one goal is to build accommodation for married students who currently have to leave their families behind.

Worship plays a very important part of community life and I was the invited preaching for the Sunday service. This was the “hottest sermon” I had ever preached – literally it was really, really hot. The service was a modified 1662 liturgy that reflects the origins of the Melanesian Mission with Bishops Selwyn and Patterson. The lack of indigenous language in the service was because of the number of different dialects in Melanesia, so that English/Pidgin are the languages everyone can understand.

The Diocese of Malaita also takes a holistic approach to ministry, by running a medical clinic 40 minutes further north from TSTM. When I was there, the head of the clinic was Fr Michael, who not only ran the clinic, he was also the head nurse and is also the local priest. This clinic takes the majority of the Diocesan budget and is vital for health services in the area – with maternity care, a children’s ward, men’s and women’s wards, and offering vaccinations and minor operations.

Conclusion.

So as we think about how we have inherited the blessing of Abraham through our relationship with Christ, as well as the mission to go and be a blessing we can also ask, “how is God calling us be a blessing to our local community and beyond?” As Nelson Anglicans we have a strong connection with the mission in Melanesia, and the Diocese of Malaita in particular. There is still much to be done in this part of the world and there is much we can offer them, as well as learn from them, by being involved in partnership

We are blessed because of our relationship with Jesus and the challenge for us all to accept the second part of that blessing – we are blessed to be a blessing both here and to the nations.