

**Sermon by the Revd Canon Dr Ray Cleary AM  
for the Second Sunday in Lent  
Trinity College Chapel Choral Evensong, 16 March 2014**

***A Call to Discipleship***

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer”.

As a young person my mother drilled into me that it was rude to be late for an appointment, especially the doctors. She also taught me that it was proper etiquette for a young person to give up his or her seat for someone older on the tram or bus. I still always arrive early and I still tend to offer my seat refusing to recognise my own age. Likewise when I received an invitation to a special event such as a birthday, wedding or other celebration it was etiquette to reply with a yes or no by the due day printed on the invitation, or asked for by the host. If yes then your host welcomed you and made the necessary arrangements to ensure that one enjoyed the occasion.

Times have changed, so many of my colleagues and friends tell me. The courtesy of replying to an invitation is not always adhered to by the due date and hosts often have to chase up those invited to find out their intentions. This certainly was my son’s experience recently when invited guests to his wedding seemed very slow in responding. Eventually when prompted they all did respond and all had a great time. The reason I am told for the delay in responding is that before we make a commitment we like to know what else may be on offering and then a choice is made. I know, I am in the eyes of some, old fashioned, but a simple yes or no does not seem to me to be unreasonable. A delayed answer suggests that we are waiting for something better to come our way before responding. Yes and by the way I always arrive early and also give up my seat.

In our readings tonight we are invited to journey and to accept an invitation from God to enter into a compact or covenant to share in the building of God’s Kingdom. The invitation is often ignored or left on the shelf while we explore other options. Increasingly the historical practice of adopting one’s family faith is fast disappearing, the passing of the baton on from one generation to the next is now not a given, while more and more Australians search for a spiritual dimension to life but without the commitment to formal religion. The cohort of cradle Anglicans is now also diminishing, as fewer children are brought to baptism and their parents are no longer church attenders even at Christmas.

In both our readings tonight we are called to go against the trend and to respond to God’s call. We are invited/called to make a choice, and in our times there are many others also seeking to claim our adherence and faithfulness. The choices we make shape our engagement with the world around us and also define who we are as individuals and our place in community. The choices we

make influence how we view life and death and therefore how we live life in relation to others and the planet.

During the season of Lent the Church invites us to recommit ourselves to God and the building of the Kingdom of God. It is an invitation likely to challenge our perceptions of ourselves and to even call us to stand out from the crowd, to be different.

Over dinner the other night with family, the issue of commitment was the subject of conversation, and in particular commitment to God. It may seem unusual to talk faith at dinner but it is not unusual in our family for faith discussions to occur and I always seem to be put under pressure to provide an answer to some challenging ethical issue or give way to the wisdom of others. Often I spell out the fact that there is no simple answer as some religious fundamentalists like to suggest and that "shit" happens as we say colloquially at times through our life and the life of others. One hopes those discussions about God and the meaning of life is alive here at Trinity and Janet Clarke Hall as both students and staff journey through their different life stages.

Commitment or joining an organization, like making choices seems to be on the decline. We may support an issue but not necessarily the organization or institution. Experience if not statistics alone suggest that church attendance, even by those who claim to be Christian, is both on the decline and for many spasmodic although Globally world religions continue to grow. Commitment to the institution of Church appears even among believers often as an optional extra. There are many competing demands upon our time and the world we live in of instant communication and rapid transport adds further to the challenges and choices offered. The invitation to share the story of God in worship, service and prayer influenced by family and work demands, special interests and other opportunities.

During the season of Lent our Old Testament lessons on Sunday evenings are drawn from the book of Exodus. Here we read the invitation from God to become a people who practice justice and kindness. Tonight's passage is often described as the call of Moses. Like the call of Abraham in Genesis it is an initiative of God, but it is much more. God hears the groans and suffering of the Israelites under the rule of the Egyptians and responds to their call for help. Moses is the chosen one to lead the people from slavery into the land of promise and although initially reluctant accepts God's promise to be him in the challenge. Moses takes God's call at his word. Both God and Moses are aware of the risks involved.

Like Moses and the Israelites we are invited into a relationship that affirms our humanity as created in the image of God, and we are called to give witness in our lives to God's passion and love for all. It is a call and invitation to a life of prayer and faithfulness to God, not to be limited to our private sphere or private life but as witness to a public proclamation confident in the presence of God in all our ordeals and hopes. It challenges us, as Pope Francis recently stated to

reject {a privatized lifestyle of faith that can lead to refuge in self at the expense of others.} In other words it is a calling to create a world where God's wisdom, grace justice and love are at the heart of all our endeavors in the knowledge of God's faithfulness. It is a call into a land of promise, of a life worthy to be lived as God planned. In tonight's passage from the book of Exodus God hears the cries of the Israelites and responds to their suffering, delivering them from the Egyptians. And they go forward to the land of promise, a land of promise not only for the Israelites but also for all peoples. It is God's promise fulfilled. The covenant realized and affirmed. They take God at his word.

In tonight's Gospel Jesus is with his disciples. The Passover meal has concluded. He returns first to the Mount of Olives where he tells the disciples that they will make a choice and desert him. He is on the last leg of the journey to Jerusalem, his place of crucifixion. He is entering the final days of his earthly ministry. In the midst of the challenges, chaos and turmoil unfolding, a pinnacle, a momentous earth-shattering event is about to be played out. As Brenda Byrne says in his commentary on tonight's Gospel "Jesus' anguished prayer in Gethsemane, when he shrinks before the prospect of death and seeks the support of three disciples, is perhaps the most poignant episode in the Gospel tradition. The account takes us into the intimacy of his relationship to the Father as well as the vulnerability and fragility of the disciples, Peter, James and John. As Jesus grapples with what is before him the choice he has to make becomes clearer. He wrestles with feelings of abandonment, loneliness and doubt. He senses little comfort from his companions and the moment of realization dawns. It is what may be described as a God Moment, the offering of God to show his love for the creation by God's own willingness to be the way of salvation. It demonstrates the outrageous love and hospitality of God to be the broker and the redeemer. It is the acceptance by God of his own word.

We today are exposed to the naked and risky claims of the Gospel, as were the disciples and the followers of Jesus of his times. At times we appear to be no better than how the disciples responded to the abuse of power and the fragmentation of God's kingdom. When we are ridiculed for the choice we make to follow in the footsteps of Jesus we gain and feel a glimpse of the fragility and humiliation experienced by Jesus throughout his ministry and later the same feelings at his trial death and crucifixion. Many of us know only too well that when confronted as with Peter we may also deny him and turn the other way.

Identification during the season of Lent with the drama of our salvation as it unfolds in the Gospel narrative, provides us with an opportunity to reconnect and to respond to the challenges and choices we need to make throughout our lifetime. It is an opportunity to reflect on the decisions we make for ourselves and for others. It is more than giving up chocolate or alcohol or the movies. While these decisions may be useful they may also divert us from the bigger picture. It is as Theologian Miroslav Volf has been speaking about here at

Trinity over the past week, to embrace what it means to live a worthy ordinary life in a context and within a broader canvas that looks beyond our selves to divine inspiration that takes seriously our relationship with God as priority. Lent provides us with a way to draw close to God, for some personal soul searching, simplicity in life style and to reorder our priorities. The season of Lent reminds us that we are all on the journey of life, a pilgrimage that starts at birth and concludes with our physical death. Throughout this life we are invited to make a choice to seek reconciliation with God and with others.

Jesus expresses in his life and ministry the fullness of God's wisdom. On the cross Jesus the victim of our brokenness, lack of charity and choice to turn away from God, confronts us with our broken humanity. Former Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams says it this way, "The cross is the place where human competition means nothing, where the admission of failure is not the end but the beginning and where no one is excluded in advance."

During this Lent may be we could find a way to bring ourselves to a similar place as Jesus, by standing with the victims of the world, as he stood with who were excluded and abused. The choice is ours. What we decide will define who we are for family friends and community. We are also invited to take God at his word.

Amen.