

St. Philip's Anglican Church — Sunday 26 August 2007 — Twelfth Sunday after Pentecost

Revd Rob Lamerton

Jeremiah 1.4-10, Psalm 71.1-6, Hebrews 12.18-29, Luke 10-17

Just the other day, as I stopped at the lights on the corner of Barry Drive and Northbourne Avenue, I caught sight of a man I recognised. I recognised him by the way he moved, as was paralysed down his left side. His left leg dragged as he walked and his left arm hung limply at his side. It was Steve (not his real name you'll realise) from a town on the coast where we used to live (I can't tell you which, because it would be easy to identify him).

Steve used to visit Sandy and me at the rectory because he could no longer fit into the local scene. He had been fit, handsome, young man, a member of the local football team with plenty of girlfriends— until his accident.

He'd set off across Australia on a motorbike and, a long way from home, lost control of his bike and hit a tree. After many months in intensive care and rehabilitation, he returned to live with his family to try to re-establish himself in his local community. With his slurred speech and strange jerking walk due to his brain injury and other problems, he found life very difficult. He was no longer the person people once knew.

All Steve could do for exercise was to walk, and he used to spend hours at the Rectory talking to Sandy or me about his hopes and dreams. Mostly they were about advances in medical science that would restore him to be the way he used to be.

Well of course it was good to catch sight of him walking the other day. But of course, apart from being seventeen years older, his physical ability was much the same.

The reason I tell that story is because I think Steve did not fully discovered God's healing, or who he was meant to be, because he always wanted to go back to how he used to be. Now, mind you, I think that is a pretty natural thing to want, but he seemed unwilling or unable to start from where he found himself.

One night in Civic, a man asked me for directions to Weston Creek. Think about giving directions to Weston Creek from Civic! You can't say, "Well, head down here and take the third street on the right." So I said, "If I was going to Weston Creek I wouldn't start from here!" But, of course, *here* was where we were, so I did my best.

I guess that is what I'm trying to say: that we begin *where we are*, with what we are and who we are.

We heard today the story of Jeremiah's call. Although there is a real awareness of "here he is" ("I do not know how to speak, I am only a boy") there is also an awareness that Jeremiah has found his true purpose, a sense that this is why he was born. "Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you a prophet to the nations." (Jer. 1.5)

I know that this is how I felt when I began to consider ordination. I thought such a thing

happened only once in a lifetime, but I now think that God calls us in different places and times to do different things. I believe that God was calling Steve to make a start on a new life and to let go of what used to be, to look at *what he might become*.

In our Gospel story, Jesus brings healing to the woman in the synagogue and sets her free from her ailment, but there are those around who object because it does not accord with the traditional religious legal way. There will always be people who don't want us to change, who want to hold us back, who want us only the way we once were. Jesus, however, points to the Sabbath as the day of God's rest, the day of God's healing. If there is a day for healing, this should be it.

Jesus is doing what he was born to do, proclaiming the ways of the kingdom of God, over and above even the Sabbath law. This is surely what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews means when he says,

You have not come to something that can be touched, a blazing fire, and darkness, and gloom, and a tempest, and the sound of a trumpet, and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that not another word be spoken to them ... But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God ... and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant ..." (Heb. 12.18, 22, 24)

We are being called forward into this glorious thing, and on the way there are stages of being where God calls us to be.

God calls us onward to discover and rediscover why we're here and to do things for which we were born—to move onward into the kingdom of Jesus. But God calls us to start from where we are!