

Sunday 5th September 2004, Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost Rob Lamerton

Readings:

- Jeremiah 18:1-11
- Psalm 139:1-5, 12-18
- Philemon 1-25
- Luke 14:25-35

Father's Day has grown over the years to become a much greater event than it needs to be. It would be enough if children just said "Thanks Dad!" Surely some heartfelt words of gratitude are better than "Happy Father's Day" which just anchors it all to one day --- instead of recognizing it is much much more.

So I hope the fathers among us are recognized appropriately. I also know that for some the relationship with their father is strained or even non-existent. I hope for them that there is someone who is a father figure who they value and love.

I am painfully aware that in Beslan in Russia there are many fathers and mothers who are grieving as a result of the terrible events of the last few days --- we must in the face of such terror and tragedy hold onto the love of God and the challenge of Jesus to count the cost of our discipleship. Take up your Cross!

What is our cross.... is it our burden to pray for the many suffering and grieving and dead... I believe it is.

If we are aware too of the great burden of people in many parts of the world... The Father's Day event and the loss of so many children's lives in Beslan coincide with the beginning of **National Child Protection Week.**

This year's theme is:

"Child Protection is Everybody's Business"

and there is quite a program of events.

In 2003 there were almost 200,000 reports of child abuse --- As well as intervention and cure we need to be actively supporting families at a time when there is often considerable distance between families and their wider family support system.

Our Diocese of Canberra and Goulburn is very serious about Child Protection. Not only protecting children in our care, but reporting on possible situations of danger to children.

Just this week a Senate Committee handed down a report on the levels of abuse of children who had been in institutional care.

As a church **AND** as a society, we must value children and support families to reduce the risk of abuse and neglect.

The reading from Jeremiah speaks about God as the potter remoulding and re-shaping of God's people like clay.

The inference is that we need to **allow** ourselves to be remodelled and re-shaped at God's hand. The re-shaping is only possible when we repent --- when we are sufficiently willing to be responsive to God --- unlike the people of Jeremiah's day who were resistant and unable to change their way.

In the second reading --- from Paul's letter to Philemon, Paul tells Philemon about Onesimus. Onesimus had come under Paul's influence in prison and deciding to be a Christian disciple was a changed person ---

Paul wrote commending Onesimus and persuading Philemon to take back this slave --- who was previously useless and is now useful --- [Onesimus means "useful"]

The moulding of God occurred in the least likely ---
the most surprising place.

Be aware that God shapes us in the most strange and
difficult situations.

[from the Persecuted Christians pamphlet:]

"When a man who had been trained by the Bible
League came to my door, I mocked him and cursed
him," Tandra William of Nigeria remembers. "Then he
came a second and third time and tried to tell me
about Christ. Again, I used foul language to humiliate
him and drive him away."

When she was drunk a few days later, Tandra fell.
Both Tandra and her baby were hurt. When people
came to help, she surprised even herself by asking
them to find the man who had visited her home
speaking of Christ.

The man returned to Tandra's home with his wife.
They took care of Tandra and her baby. When
Tandra's new Christian friend read to her from the
Bible "I understood my plight," says Tandra. "It was
like someone throwing a bucket of cold water on my
face to sober me up from a drunken stupor." Her
friend had shared from Hebrews 9:27-28, "Just as
man is destined to die once and after that to face
judgement, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away
the sins of many people; and he will appear a second
time, not to bear sin but to bring salvation to those
who are waiting for him."

I repented of my sins and accepted Christ," says
Tandra.

These stories also illustrate the call of Jesus to "take
up your cross" --- maybe it could be translated "face
up to your real self"

maybe that's what taking up our cross is all about. ---
Counting the cost means facing the hard questions:

- about life

- about ourselves
- about being human

So then, in facing the hard questions, we are opening ourselves up to being reshaped, moulded into something new.

Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem when he spoke about "carrying the cross and being his disciple". Was he in facing his own difficult task becoming more the son the Father called him to be?

moulded and shaped by hardship, prayer and struggle... more and more into the likeness of God ---
Is that the way for us too? **I believe it is!**

One of the hardest things to do where we would have to count the cost occurs when Jesus speaks about possessions --- In an affluent society this may be one of the most difficult things to do --- but I urge you to think about all you have and how you might be changed if you let some of it go.

On this Father's Day when so many things are given
As we think about the tragedy of Beslan and the protection of our children

facing the hard questions ---
Let's think about the cost for us as Christians and how we might be moulded or shaped to become more God's new creatures....