

Reflection for A Celebration of Ministry of Archdeacon Gail Hagon:

Holy Endings and New Beginnings

Christ Church Cathedral, Grafton 14 December 2018

A Reflection on Luke 4:16-21

In a biography I read recently Helen Garner reflected on her faith journey and the part that the church played in that. I quote a very brief excerpt ...

I went to church because life is tough and painful, and because I need to pray and to be cared for and challenged and forgiven and fed and blessed – so it means a lot to me that the person who preaches should have a grasp of – or at least a respect for – the difficulties that I, and other people like me, have with the whole matter of faith. [A Writing Life: Helen Garner and her work, 2017]

Maybe we can all resonate with her need. To minister to that need, in that pastoral space, of reconciliation and a shared journey, is indeed a high calling; a call to walk on Holy ground; a privilege, yet a great responsibility as well.

The ministry that Jesus' describes in Luke 4, the ministry to which he was called, occupies that space and would be Good News to the author whom I quoted. In Jesus, God ministers healing, reconciliation & forgiveness. He proclaims in the synagogue that he's called to a caring and pastoral ministry. But it's also a ministry of decisive action and advocacy: of justice, freedom, liberation.

The poor here are those who cannot even demand justice for themselves.

Biblical scholar JB Caird writes that in this passage the heart of Jesus' entire ministry is defined and announced ... In Jesus, the God of justice is active for the poor and oppressed. This is our mission too. Like the Great Commission it should guide, direct and shape our ministries.

Unlike many of you I haven't known Gail for a long time. I've known her for a couple of years but not very well until a few months ago when I was driving along the road, happily minding my own business, when I received a call from Gail as. Hair of the Bishop Election Board. Since then it's been a privilege to have her as a friend and colleague.

From what I do know of Gail, she lives out that pastoral, caring ministry of healing and reconciliation - she is a gifted listener, companion and guide for many.

Yet she has many other gifts as well. She isn't afraid to take action and to advocate for individuals and communities. Here, Gail has often challenged us to move forward in mission.

Thankfully we're not saying goodbye ... Gail will still have a ministry among us ... yet today we recognise that the phase of Gail's ministry as Diocesan Archdeacon and MDO is drawing to a close.

For this ministry of Gail, we give thanks as a whole diocese, because by it, we have all been blessed, God's church has grown in number, and God's name glorified.

This passage from Luke 4 has no doubt been a formative one for Gail. If you respect and admire her ministry, as I do, then maybe you and I should take a closer look at it.

In what way has God chosen you / chosen me? In what way is his Spirit on you / me? What is he calling us to? How can we use the gifts he has given us to bring good news, to the poor, and to others who can't advocate for themselves? How can we use our gifts to minister healing, forgiveness, and reconciliation, to journey with the burdened and battered, and to take action in mission when it needs to be taken?

Through lives given over to his service, may we give thanks to the one who is, the one who calls, and the one who leads us on.

+Murray Harvey