

Reading: John 17:20-26

Rebecca, our youngest, was just beginning to think about what she wanted to do when she grew up. Trying to be a good father, I took her to one side and gave her the talk. "You know, Rebecca, you are intelligent and able. You can do anything you want with your life." Later that night she was bouncing on the trampoline, so mum called out to her, "Why aren't you doing your homework?" "Dad says I can do anything I like with my life."

Today in my sermon I want to explore the question how do we know what God is calling us to do?

In our Gospel we have a very privileged position. We are listening in on Jesus at prayer. It's very interesting to hear what people pray about. Jesus knows he must soon leave the disciples. His first concern is for the unity of Christians - that we might be one so that the world might believe. Secondly, he prays that we might be where he is, and thirdly, that we might have his love. "Father," he prays, "I desire that these also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am." But where is Jesus in the world? How do we find out what God is calling us to be and do? How do we follow Jesus into the world?

On Wednesday I was given a rare treat. Even though I'm not a woman, the AAW has granted me honorary membership. Membership, as they say on the American Express ad, has its privileges. They make egg sandwiches to die for. I try and just eat one or two, but somehow 3 or 4 jump into my mouth. Wednesday was 'domestic day'. I was frightened that this meant they were going to argue with each other. What it turned out to mean was that Fay Mangos was invited to come and share two things which the church here does. She talked about the English as a Second Language class and Mainly Music. You could see the delight and the joy that she and everyone involved in those ministries gets. She concluded: "I am sure," she said, "that we get much more out of it than we ever put in." And trust me, they put a lot in!

Frederick Buechner, an American Presbyterian minister and writer, once wrote... "The place God calls you to, is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Mainly music and ESOL are just that. They're ministries which meet a deep need and where the team finds deep joy.

For some reason which I have never understood, we think that to be doing God's will, to be living out God's calling in our lives, we need to be miserable. To find our calling is not to be weighed down or suffering, but rather, it is to find deep joy.

On this Mothers' Day, we are reminded of that. To be a mother is a deep joy. I know there are hard times, but deep down what a gladness to bring a new life into the world. To be a mother meets a deep hunger in our world too. Not super spiritual, kids are just plain hungry most of the time!

If you are asking yourself what is God calling me to do, remember that this is a question we ask ourselves often in our lives, beginning in our teenage years.

Don't think of God as a big ogre trying to drag you into something you hate. Rather ask yourself the question, what brings me joy? What do I have a passion about? What gives me energy? This is the God given clue to what you need to be doing. Then ask yourself, how does this meet deep hunger in the community? Where your finding of joy and the need of the world intersect, you have yourself a calling.

Jesus is still praying that where he is we might be also. "The place God calls you to, is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." That sounds very cool, but what does it look like in reality?

Jim was a hairdresser. He liked his work but he had never thought of it as a ministry. He went to church, but that was Sunday and work, well, that was Monday. He had a friend, Sue. She worked at the local women's refuge. He didn't know where it was. No one was told so that the women could be safe. One day Sue asked Jim if he might go and cut some of the women's hair. It started small, Jim said, just one or two.

Then it became a regular weekly slot. "I just kind of slipped into it, but it's a real position of trust. For many of the women, I'm the first man to approach them after they have been brutalised at the hands of a man. Not only do I touch them but I come at them with scissors. I'm there to show them that not all men are brutes. Men can still be trusted. I also help them to feel good about themselves again. I do whatever they want with their hair, and I do it for free. After I have finished, they look and feel great. It gives me great pleasure and it meets a real need. Something the vicar said one Sunday got me thinking that what I do is a real ministry. It's something Jesus would have me do."

As Christians, we have the greatest gift of all that we can bring to every task we do: God's love. Simply by being who we are, we bring hope to a broken world. Mary Sumner the founder of the AAW wrote this prayer: *All this day, O Lord, let me touch as many lives as possible for thee, and every life I touch do thou by thy Spirit quicken, whether through the word I speak, the prayer I breathe, or the life I live. Someone must have been listening because today the organisation she founded has 14 million members. Mary pray let us pray too*

Let us pray.

Lead us O Lord to that place where we find joy

Lead us O lord to that place where we find the needs of the world

And grant us that which is only yours to give -

True purpose of life

And lasting happiness

Amen

Nick