

Sermon
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Eaglehawk Uniting Church
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I keep hearing a bit about road rage. But in a wider sense, what gets God's people hot under the collar? Perhaps the inequalities of wealth or resources, or the disasters that claim thousands of lives, or the drug taking that seems to be destroying so many people? Or, do we merely get angry when we don't get our own way, or when someone has the audacity to question what we do? Jeremiah is called by God to be a prophet and eventually got put in the stocks, - for telling the truth. Luke tells us about the people of God getting offended and violent because Jesus said God's mission is to care for others and not only our own.

You might think that this couldn't and doesn't happen now but I wonder if we feel annoyed when our leaders don't live up to our expectations, and especially if leaders don't look after our community. I wonder if we also say things like - our task is to look after our own people first. A person involved in community work is expected to also care for his/her family. Congregations sometimes expect clergy to care for the people of the Congregation before they go doing things in the Pres., Synod, Cluster or wider community. Politicians are expected to look after their constituents rather than their party. Some people expect governments to protect primary producers or industries from too much overseas competition. Many say overseas aid is ok in moderation but our people are first priority. Charity begins at home. Like anything else these ideas can become an obsession. Sometimes looking after your own is called parochialism or selfishness. Parochialism can often mean look after only your own.

For Jesus, the rage seems to have happened because of some local rivalry – you know Bendigo v's Eaglehawk Borough, rural v's city, my church's needs are greater than your church's needs, especially when it comes to allocating funding for programs. We look after our own cause. If we don't do that no-one else will. Everywhere I have been in the church there have been a few people who felt they had to compete with other Christians, denominations or religions. Look after our own is the cry..

But Jesus reminded the people in church that day that when hundreds of widows were starving during a drought, God sent the prophet Elijah only to a foreign widow in Sidon, a Phoenician city where other gods were worshipped. And although there were many lepers in Israel in the time of Elisha, Elisha was only sent only to the foreigner Namaan, the Syrian. In the same way, people in Capernaum are as important as people in Nazareth. WELL! The people went right off. Years of anger and disappointment exploded into rage. They tried to run Jesus off a cliff but he walked right through the crowd as if they were powerless to stop him. Eventually he was killed on a cross.

We might reflect on a few things in this story?

Our faith can be, and is, often affected by attitudes in our community. But faith is meant to challenge community thinking and not just support it or go along with it. Take local rivalries. When we get caught up in local rivalries our faith asks how important those rivalries are in relation to the work God calls us to do, accepting people for eg. The church is called to bring people together – not drive them apart. The call to love calls us to look for other ways of dealing with rivalries than just taking sides. As Jesus followers, our ministry is to care for more than our own. Jesus is leading us beyond local rivalries, whether between cultures, churches, local towns or families.

People in Nazareth apparently wanted God to treat them as a bit special. They didn't seem to think others deserved to share Jesus with them. The question is do we deserve to be accepted and loved? Maybe none of us deserve that. It is God's grace and goodness that accepts us in spite of our failings. Any talk about deserving God's love seems to assume we are different from others, or more deserving than others. Perhaps we are anxious that if God loves everyone there might not be enough

love to go around and we might miss out. The church was one of the first groups on earth to have a global focus, to be secure enough in God's love to say God loves all people. The Lord's Prayer teaches us to say, "OUR Father", Give us today OUR daily bread, Forgive us OUR sins, Save US, Deliver US. If God is calling us to think about others as much as ourselves, what changes might that demand of us, or what opportunities might that provide?

The call of God in these stories reminds us that we are living for a purpose larger than ourselves and our needs. A difficulty faced by Jeremiah and by the people of Nazareth is - how can we commit ourselves to the ways of God when there doesn't seem to be much in it for us? Part of the answer to this has to be that the US, must include rather than exclude others. We learn to do things so everyone shares in the outcome.

Do we expect to get some benefits from all that we do like more people coming to church, or wanting to belong to our groups, or being willing to help with our causes? How much are we prepared to do things for others without any personal benefit?

At the end of Luke's story, Jesus walks through the crowd and from the cliff face - in total freedom. That sounds rather magical but I wonder if it is a reminder that God walks away from protecting our local concerns when they shut others off from God's love, and, that we are also free to put aside any self serving so we can share God's ministry to all.