

# Homily for Parishes in the Western Region without clergy

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> August 2019, Pentecost 10

Readings: Isaiah 5:1-7

Psalm 80:1-2, 8-19

Hebrews 11:29-12:2

Luke 12:49-59

Two weeks ago I had the great joy of preaching to The Glennie School community as they celebrated their Founder's Day Service. The school is named after Archdeacon Benjamin Glennie who pioneered Anglican ministry on the Darling Downs one hundred and fifty years ago. I particularly think of Archdeacon Glennie when I sit quietly in St Mark's, Warwick, and watch the stained glass filtered light putting colours on old sandstone. It's a lovely place to pray, and I find it reassuring somehow to know that Archdeacon Glennie prayed in the same place many years ago.

I guess Benjamin Glennie for me is one of the 'cloud of witnesses' that the letter to the Hebrews speaks of in this week's New Testament reading. He was someone who lived a faith-filled life, and who made a positive difference in the lives of many through his ministry. However we understand it, I reckon the 'cloud of witnesses' would include an almost impossibly hard to imagine number of people! They would include people who have been named in Biblical writing, women and men designated as saints and martyrs by the Church, and those in more recent times who we have come to know, or know about. Surely the 'cloud' would include people who are known by many, and a great many more who are known only to God.

I think it is both humbling and inspiring to be part of an ongoing community of faith which is simultaneously past, present, and future. One of the images that comes to my mind when thinking about this is an athletics relay race. In this, one person runs a circuit before passing it on to the next runner, who then runs a circuit before passing the baton on to the next runner, and... so on until the race is completed.

The language and metaphor of running is also used in the Letter to the Hebrews for the first verse of chapter twelve continues, 'Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and the sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race is set before us, looking to Jesus the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...'

I wonder what 'running the race with perseverance' meant for those early Christian communities who first read and heard it, and what this means for us two thousand years later. Do we 'run the race' trying to beat others, and win medals to prove our value, or does our faith call us to run collaboratively without seeking individual honours? My hunch is that the collaborative approach needs both maturity and humility.

In a recent Facebook post a wise parishioner from Toowoomba shared some thoughts about life and faith which spoke powerfully to me about how we can each 'run the race'. I have received permission from the writer to share some of her thoughts in this homily, because it will challenge all of us to better run the race and understand our place in the scheme of things.

Dr Diana Wong is a parishioner of St Bart's, Toowoomba. She is a wife, a mother, a General Practitioner, and a musician. Diana wrote...

*"Lately, I've been thinking a lot about death. Not in, I don't think, a morbid way. But just about the certainty of it. That is, the certainty of death, and the uncertainty of life. One day, I left my house, and I realised that I couldn't guarantee I wouldn't die unexpectedly, and so not come back.*

*Now that may sound like I'm thinking about it in a morbid way, but it wasn't something that necessarily made me anxious or worried. Rather it made me realise that this life is limited, and I am limited. My time is limited.*

*And it really got me thinking about my priorities. What is important? What constitutes a life well lived? If I were to die today, what would my regrets be? What would I be glad I did or didn't do? What is my purpose? Where do I draw my meaning in life from?*

*And then it got me thinking that one of the clearest ways of seeing my priorities would be seeing what are the hopes and dreams I have for my kids..?*

*...As a parent, I know that I will need to wrestle with caring about things that are only of secondary importance. And while I think it is important to give a good effort, and I don't think success is necessarily a bad thing, I do think (and hopefully don't forget too often) that there is something far, far better.*

*I believe God has a purpose for my life, and for the life of my children. It may look mediocre, or not very exciting to some. But that's OK. Possibly no one will remember our names once we're gone, or think we were important. But, that's OK. I have no idea what lies ahead in my children's lives, what they will think, value or believe; the choices they will make. There are so many uncertainties. But, that's OK too. God is good."*

I think this last paragraph expresses a wise, counter-cultural humility, that is worth hearing again:

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God's blessing on your pilgrimage, and mine... as we live our lives, and 'run the race'; and, may God's Spirit sustain and guide each of us in the journey being travelled. Amen