Reflection for 3 July 2011 – Alan Albany

Introduction

In reflecting on today's readings I tried to find a common theme running through them and to me it seems that it is about making choices.

Choices

We all make choices every day; some are trivial such as which colour socks to wear. Some have a bit more significance like 'should I wear the long johns today' – it can be cold in here sometimes. Other choices are life changing. I probably would not be standing here today if my parents had not made a choice to come from England to Australia when I was 3 years old- my father was a priest and he was also asthmatic to damp climate and after a serious bout of pneumonia the doctor had said to him "I don't know why you stay in this country – you need to go to a hot dry climate". About that time the then Archbishop of Perth was in Britain looking for clergy to fill country parishes. So my parents heard the message and took to choice to come to Australia – a few months later we were in Morawa in the northern wheatbelt – it was hot and dry – and in 1949 pretty primitive – all gravel roads, kerosene fridge, toilet was a thunderbox out the back behind the garage, the town powerhouse only 200 meters away was a constant thump-thump-thump. My mother was a Londoner so she took some time to adapt - but that doctor was right – the hot dry climate did wonders for my Dad's health. – he lived to the age of 91.

Similarly a year or so ago I had to choose whether to be part of the housing development next door or stay in my safe, debt free but solitary home in Hilton. I think I have made the right choice but the outworking is still to be fulfilled. (I am told the builders hope to be finished by next weekend.)

OT Gen 24

Background to story

Similarly in our Old Testament lesson – Rebekah has to make a life-changing choice. But first some background. Abraham is getting old, his wife Sarah has died 3 or 4 years before, his son Isaac is approaching 40 and is not yet married. Abraham does not fancy having one of the local Canaanite women as a daughter-in-law (probably

wise as later on Isaac and Rebekah's son Esau marries 2 of them and they are nothing but trouble to Isaac and Rebekah – such that they send their other son Jacob off back to Rebekah's family to get a wife – buts that's a story for another week). So Abraham sends his senior servant off from where he is living in Canaan (probably around what is now Beersheba in modern day Israel a bit south of Jerusalem) back to where he had come from (to the area of Haran in what is now north western Iraq – a journey of about 700 km) to get a wife for Isaac from among his own kinfolk. The servant is led –by divine guidance as we heard the servant recount in the reading - to select Rebekah who is Isaac's cousin once removed – she being the grand-daughter of Abraham's brother Nahor.

Rebecca has to choose to go or stay

At first Rebekah's father and brother (in a section the reading skipped) seem to accept this choice as a fait accompli but then they are considerate enough to ask Rebekah herself 'Will you go with this man'. Rebekah seems to have got the message that this is her destiny – so in spite of the fact she will probably never see her parents and family again she replies "I will go.' And so she rides off into the sunset with Abraham's servant to Canaan to marry Isaac.

NT Rom 7:14-25

Paul's wrestle in his own strength with choice between sin and righteousness

The New Testament reading from the last part of Romans Ch 7 seems to me to be Paul's recounting of the losing struggle he had in his own strength to make the right choice between sin and righteousness by trying to obey the law. He only gives a hint in todays reading as to the resolution when he says 'Thanks be to God, through Jesus Christ our Lord'. In the next chapter of Romans he gives his full resolution, but that is next weeks New Testament reading.

Gospel part 1 - Matt 11:15-19

Background

Today's gospel is made up of two passages from Matthew Ch 11. In the section before these passages, John the Baptist's disciples have come to ask if Jesus is the 'real deal'.

Jesus replies – 'see for yourself – the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are healed, the deaf hear and the Good News is preached'. Then Jesus comments to the crowd on the significance of John the Baptist as being the foretold prophet who would prepare the way for the Messiah.

Jesus comparing response to John the Baptist and himself

In the first of today's passages, Jesus is commenting on the response to both John the Baptist and himself. He is saying that rather than 'getting with the message' the generation of his day have made the choice to avoid responding by criticizing the messengers - a tactic that modern politicians have turned into an art form.

Gospel part 2 - Matt 11:25-30

Jesus describes relationship between himself and the Father (the Divine)

In the second Gospel passage, Jesus talks of the intimate relationship between himself and the Father – and that he is revealing to us ordinary people that this relationship with the Divine is available to us as well.

Invitation to come to Jesus

Jesus finishes by making his famous invitation "All you who are weary and heavy laden, come to me and I will give you rest. My yoke is easy and my burden is light."

Quote Message translation

I would like to read this final passage in the Message translation as I think it gives a good sense of what Jesus is on about.

[Read Matt 11:25-30 in the Message translation by Eugene H. Peterson]

Conclusion

The choice to accept this invitation of Jesus' to 'walk and keep company with him' is open to each of us. I think it is like all of Jesus's invitations – it needs to be taken in the 'God of the Now' tense – the present continuous – as in 'Ask and keep on asking, seek and keep on seeking, knock and keep on knocking'. So I think the message from today is 'choose and keep on choosing.'