

Diocesan Sermon
Fifth Sunday after Pentecost. Matthew 10:40–42.
Reverend Canon Helen Ferguson PSM, Broken Hill and the Far West.

Here we are in Ordinary time and, I've said it before, there's nothing ordinary about it. The church calendar has us progressing through Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, Easter, Ascension, Pentecost and now Ordinary time. We celebrate God with scripture readings, hymns, fasts, feasts and communal meals - all the while keeping our focus on three pillars of Anglicanism: Scripture, Tradition and Reason. These times throughout the church calendar teach us the way the church has walked through the story of Jesus together, season after season, century after century. We pass the baton on, so to speak, to the next generation of Christians.

And in this Ordinary time, today in Broken Hill, and in other churches around the world dedicated to St Peter, we celebrate his Feast by acknowledging the work St Peter did. Not that it's anything new, we do it every year. Our tradition is in keeping with the mainstay for Jesus – hospitality. We love it and if I may say so, we're good at it. No brag just fact, as someone famous once said.

But it's not just one single meal, or one simple act of kindness, on one particular day. It's more an acknowledgement of how we celebrate an occasion and what the celebration means to us personally. Sometimes, when we read our bibles, we get what Jesus is telling us in an instant and at other times, we need to really think about it, digest it, and work out what it means for us – often taking days or even years! In ancient Greece, there were two words for time - Chronos time, where we rush around according to the clock and calendar. And Kairos time that brings deep meaning and sometimes insight to us at a particular time. Kairos time is difficult to translate simply to English, but this kind of time reminds us of how we are as people at a particular time. Maybe a good translation might be better understood by the "Aha" moment – when we've mulled over something important and then we realise that particular "something" that has evaded us, is as clear as a bell. Jesus wants us to work out for ourselves who we are and how important God is to each and every one of us, every day of our lives.

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells his disciples as he sends them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God: "Whoever welcomes you welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes the one who sent me." Jesus wanted to push the point to the Disciples that they were going into communities where they would be dependent upon the hospitality and kindness of others. Although the culture of the day was to welcome a traveller, Jesus takes this further by telling

the Disciples that for those people welcoming them, it is like them welcoming Christ himself, and in doing so they welcome God.

These much-needed words of encouragement would've been music to the Disciples ears. They knew the difficulties they would face as they travelled from place to place, relying on the generosity of believers. By proclaiming Jesus in most communities, they knew they would face rejection, suspicion, hardship. However, they were committed, buoyed by Jesus' words of the rewards given to people who welcome them. There would be no material gain, but that by each person aligning themselves with God's purpose, they would meet his expectations and receive the blessings of God's Kingdom. You heard where even a small act of kindness matters – something that doesn't take wealth or status, just kindness. There were no time limits on the Disciples by Jesus as these men had important work to do and often this takes time. Their task didn't operate to union rules, they were to teach, preach, heal and to tell people about the Kingdom of God, not just one time only but to be available and consistent 24 hours per day, 7 days a week.

And it's the same for us today. We occasionally get the opportunity to host a travelling missionary but more likely in our daily lives we get opportunities to offer kindness to people who are struggling, to pray for and with people, being generous in giving, and it's our privilege to see Christ in every person we come across.

Today's Gospel reading reminds us that hospitality is not a small or secondary virtue. It is a way of participating in God's mission. Those who offer welcome, encouragement, and support become partners in the work of the Gospel. We are called by God to be people of hospitality and generosity to all people, not only our neighbours and our friends but to everyone, including those most vulnerable in our community.

We are reminded that no act of love is ever too small to matter. According to God, even a cup of water given to someone in need, brings us close to God.

We can easily acknowledge Jesus' call to us to be hospitable and generous - he reminded us earlier in this Gospel, "we received without charge: give without charge".

We are each sent to share the Good News, freely, generously and without fear. Everything we have is a gift from God and we are urged to look for Christ in all we meet, our neighbour, strangers, those who are vulnerable, and in those who serve God faithfully, never forgetting we are all God's children.