

Sermon 24th August 2014
'Take Action' Exodus 1:8- 2:10 Romans 12:1-8

Prayer: God in Christ, you call us to take action, and to live in the world. A world of things insignificant and overwhelming. We thank you for all who act on behalf of others and we thank you for those who use the gifts you have given to do your will. May they inspire us to live into your call and take action. Amen

"The future depends on what you do today" is a quote from Mahatma Gandhi. Escapism is a major flaw of our human condition! How many of us struggle to believe the future actually depends on what we – as in 'I' do today? If we actually think about the future at all is not the conversation with self-more along the lines of... "I am not 'important / big / significant / valued... enough to influence *well influence anything really....*" And bolstering our thinking logic is the 'Christian training of not being allowed to be 'proud' and self-serving – and brag / boast that we might be important! And so somewhere in this continuum we find an escape hatch to allow us to do nothing... Wrong!

Ghandi also said: "Whatever you do will be insignificant, but it is very important that you do it." Ghandi was right; the future does depend on what you do today, even if to you it is an insignificant little thing! Your actions are an integral part of what happens tomorrow in your life **and** in the lives of all those around you. The things, great and small that you do impact your living and that means you have a huge potential to be an influence for the Lord far beyond your knowing. You know the saying – You may be the only Bible other people ever read? Frightening – right, so what are you doing about it?

Today we have two wonderful Bible passages which help us to explore how important it is to take action in faith – by faith because we don't know how the Lord will be able to use: magnify – bless what we think is an insignificant the little thing. The two passages have quite different approaches but complement each other I believe for us as followers of Christ. CV

Paul teaches about how we as individuals are to make sure our lives; the actions we live by are securely anchored in Biblical teaching. *Paul begins this piece using an image everyone can recognise but he begins this teaching from the fact that what we do, the great or insignificant – all that we do is in response to what God in Christ **has already done** for us. He says (vs1) '***In view of God's mercy,***' Loader says this is Paul calling us to respond to the **already acting heart** of God: God's compassion – God's mercy.

In view of God's mercy – offer, in view of God's compassion toward you **take action** in this world in ways and by means that extend compassion, mercy, love to all your life touches. In order to do this and keep doing it we believe we have to stay in Christ- stay connected to Christ and to each other – which is Paul's argument today using the language of the 'Body'.

He talks of offering our bodies as a sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God as a spiritual act of worship, allowing the Lord to transform our minds in a process of constant renewal so that we are always working to shape our lives according to God, the God **he met** in Jesus. Paul never saw being a Christian as a life membership on a roll somewhere. It was always **entry into a relationship and growth** in that relationship. For Paul, talk of shaping one's life **was the same** thing as talking about one's God.

* "In his day - and certainly in ours - there are many people who count themselves as Christian, but are shaped by the prevailing values of those around them in a way **that undoes anything** that Christ might have wanted in their lives. They reflect particular national, political or social values, sometimes not even knowing they stand under such influence. They can even call some of these values "Christian". But there is no engagement with what is **at the heart** of Christ's message."

Paul knows about shaping lives. In this letter he urges the Romans to engage in a process where they are shaped **not** by the prevailing fashions of the age **but by Christ**. It is in that sense a counter cultural

renewal to which he calls the Romans. The renewing of one's mind - stance, attitudes, orientation - is the basis not only for individual wholeness but **also for a healthy community** or congregation. We can have as many theological waves of fashion to tell us how to be successful churches, and what method we need to be grow to be a mega church, or which business school rules to follow but today Paul writes that no set of rules will work **without** a holistic approach which involves **transformation into** the ways of God.

His gospel speaks about a process of renewal which changes people's attitudes and from that process of transformation changed behaviour flows. **It is relationship based, not rule based**, just as the gifts given by God through the Spirit are to build the body of Christ. They are not given by divine right as faith bonuses or earned promotion rewards... *1DeLaar uses the language of salvation to say it this way: "...We are brought into relationship with God through Christ (saved) in order to offer ourselves to serve in the Church and the world according to our gifting. Salvation is not something that happens TO us, so much as it is something that happens WITH us..... As Church we really need to hear this call of God, and bring our gifts and our connections (as Romans teaches) and offer them to be agents of God's salvation for the **people in our communities and families now.**"

We are to take action now *just as* in our Exodus reading the 'little people' took action and together with God – salvation's plan is worked out. Remember: the future depends on what you do today? Salvation begins by using our gifts and talents now and allowing God to take and use to complete His plans. cV

The picture to *illustrate in full colour and in detail* this is the Exodus passage. As a timeline catch up we have been following Abraham's story; through his son Isaac, through his grandson Jacob/Israel; through to his great-grandson Joseph. Remember Joseph was sold into slavery but rose to a position of great power and saved Egypt and many of the surrounding peoples. Then begins our story today, **a new** Pharaoh - who didn't know Joseph is in power. That's telling us *in shorthand* a couple of generations have passed, the seat of power has shifted and the memory of the foreigner who had been 2nd in charge of the country and saved it from famine has gone. cV

Interestingly the people have flourished. Abraham's promise of being the father thousands has come true, and in their time it was understood that abundance equalled God's blessing and presence. **But the new** Pharaoh is scared of the potential threat and has a couple of genocide attempts. Did Shiprah and Puah have any idea that the future, the salvation of God's people **depended on them** as they went about their daily work as mid-wives? ->

Did a very ordinary Levite mum know how much the future salvation of God's people depended on her and **her actions** taken in faith to save her baby boy? Did his big sister? Did the daughter of the Pharaoh? I am sure they all knew the risks involved and the potential consequences but **as they did** what they could with what they had – **God's plan** of salvation and **the future** of God's people were secured. Cv

Have you ever stopped to reflect on the little fact that we have no idea which Pharaoh it actually was? Seti I (late 13th century BCE) or Ramses II in the 12th century BCE are the most likely, **but we do know** two midwives called Shiprah and Puah! Insignificant midwives doing their *stuff*, recorded for all time.

What we see as little or insignificant is not necessarily that way **once God is involved**. Once we enter into the relationship with God in Christ, we begin a process of renewal and transformation that is built on the **foundation of that relationship**. The process of renewal and the transformation that **begins enables** us to offer ourselves in service in the church and to the world. The process is enabled **because** of the gifts we have that as we use them, they and we grow in maturity of faith with each other and our Lord.

Remember Ghandi? "Whatever **you do** will be insignificant, but it is very important that **you do** it," because "The future depends on what **you do** today". **Take action.** Amen.