

Call and Response (Ezekiel 24:27)

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‘On that day you shall be opened to the one who has escaped, and you shall speak and no longer be silent. So you shall be a sign to them, and they shall know that I am the Lord’ (Ezekiel 24:27)

The short Ezekiel text is heartfelt. It is chosen because it tells something of my own early difficult story.

But first, Call and Response, as I see it, is all about perception; our perception of God, and of our perception of the call, and love of God. Further, it is about our ‘seeing’, our sight to, and of, God. We do have ‘hindsight’, we do have ‘foresight’, but the greatest gift of all we have is that of ‘insight’.

Sometimes we walk with the angels, and yet, we can stumble. Within the Benedictus community, in humility, we are encouraged to try again. Then we can see; see to be the children of God; and so to give, and accept, human love; and to speak and respond ‘with’ God.

I had the good fortune to be born into a loving, church going family. I attended a church school, and later studied at Sydney’s National Art School. I was president, I remember, of the student association. In some complete contrast, I served my time in National Service. Later, I lived and worked in England for five years, and was married to Ro in Shakespeare’s church in Stratford on Avon.

After returning, and teaching in Sydney, we moved to Canberra in 1971, and as a potter, I taught for twenty one years, at the Canberra School of Art.

A significant change was then to study Theology at St. Mark's; and after graduating was ordained an Anglican deacon, working in hospital chaplaincy, and then being part of ANU's Chaplaincy Team. Our family has had many links with St. Paul's Anglican church in Manuka, for over forty years. As you know, I am married to Rosemary, and we have three adult children, of whom we are immensely proud. Our third child, and second daughter we adopted. She has been one of the greatest joys of our lives.

We have been part of Benedictus pretty much since its inception, having known Sarah since she was a schoolgirl.

I would like to offer another quote:

'And I said to the man who stood by the gate of the year
"Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown".

And he replied:

"Go out into the darkness, and put your hand into the Hand of God.

That shall be to you better than light, and safer than a known way".

So I went forth, and finding the Hand of God, trod gladly into the night.

And He led me towards the hills and into the breaking of day in the east'.

This quote from Minnie Louise Haskins really encompasses my reflection.

I do have to immediately say that the aims, and gifts, of our Benedictus community are perfect examples of 'Call and Response'; Silence, Hospitality, Discernment, Reconciliation, and Adventure. These are a call to 'be', and to be more than we are; to put our hand into the hand of God, and to speak with God.

Call is an invitation; our response is individual and personal. As an ecumenical community, from many backgrounds, we are called to worship God together; in our prayers, and in a community of common integrity. I would like to think that we are, and can be the church of now, and of the future. I pray it might be so.

For many years I worked within Lifeline. In discussion within this team, a Christian said that it was the most 'Christian' thing that he did. A Jewish member said it was the most Jewish thing he did, and a humanist said it was the most humane thing he did. Such is response to a call! Also I learnt a process of discernment, and of asking the question 'What would you like to say?' Better to ask 'What would you "really" like to say? More helpful still is to ask 'What would you really like to say "if you dared?'" Dare we dare? In daring, I believe we can dare to pray, and in our lives together meet God. We love silence, but sometimes we have to dare to speak, with God.

Recently, in France, I saw the saying: 'Our mind is like a parachute, it works only when it is open'! Openness, and in our being open to the other, is like silence. We may hear what is said, and we may also hear what is not said. Wisdom is not so much our finding answers, but in our asking questions. Openness challenges our body, mind, and spirit. As children of God, I am sure God wants our questions.

As a child I prayed that I might loose my stammer. I was inhibited, shy, and could not speak. My embarrassment was acute, and was many times brought to tears. The child had to find a new way to communicate, in drawing and painting, which offered me imagination and creativity. As an adult, I give thanks that this opportunity has set me free.

Later, I have come to love words, words to share, and the poetry of our minds. Similarly, the arts can speak to us. Visually, we can see God, and we can recognise God's humanity in the faces of those around us. I come now to the centerpiece.

I was much moved by the tsunami in the Arche province of Indonesia some years ago, and made a triptych of three paintings: first of the wave approaching, then of the breaking of the wave, and third, its aftermath. I have now added a fourth painting. This may be seen as metaphor or paradox: which includes disasters, and of the peace and silence of the

sanctuary. [In this case, it being the chapel of St. Mark's in Barton, which some of you may, or may not recognise!] Peace, the opposite of war, and disasters can bring grace, the grace of our being blest, in the presence of God. In disaster, we may not have a chapel, but we will always have God.

My own response can be to visualize what is difficult. Images, in silence, can often say as much as words. A call can resonate the corridors of our minds, but the arts can colour our body, mind, and spirit.

I wish to conclude my story of recognizing God's call with three found objects. The first is from a broken tractor: to me it has been the sign of the cross, within a unifying circle. I have used it many times in talks and workshops, and as an altar image. It is heavy, strong, and is a much loved symbol.

The second is the wonder of a worn river stone. It is eons old. Its jagged edges have been worn smooth. It couldn't be more broken, and yet it couldn't be more perfect. What may be discarded, or not seen, tells the story of God's eternity.

The third found object is a poster from London's St. Paul's Cathedral. Like all cathedrals, it is intriguing and beautiful, as is the isometric drawing. It shows in great detail the structure of the building; a building celebrated and loved. The contrast is, of course, that people build the church building, but the people of God are themselves 'church'.

To find, or to be found; to call, or be called; to rest, or respond? We do have the choice. To make, and to be church, is the essential Call, and together we respond to that call. Now, together, in church and community, we 'discern' God'; we are 'reconciled' with God; we share 'silence' and 'hospitality' with God. God calls, and we dare to respond to the 'adventure'.

Finally, we remember that the word Benedictus means Blessed. Our call, our response, our lives in community, are 'blessed'.

Indeed, we are truly blest.

Amen.