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Trust Me (Luke 9. 51-62)

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'No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God', Jesus said to a would-be follower.

Many years ago when I was studying theology at St Mark's in Canberra as an independent student, I was also wanting to find out more about my friend David's death in a car accident 10 years earlier. I wanted to know where his ashes were, so I went to visit his parents. His father was an Anglican priest in Braidwood so I made my way there and showed him some photographs I had of David sleeping on the top of my bright green 1970s bedspread, and David's mum, Ellen said 'that's exactly how he looked after he died, peaceful and at rest', and told me that David's ashes were in the garden at their home in Hackett.

I stayed there in Braidwood overnight and the next day David's father, Bill asked me, "Where are you at with ordination?" And I said "well, I haven't done anything about it because I think I'm not committed enough because I want to get married and have children".

He said, "you can do both you know!"

And then he said "there is something in the Gospels which says, 'when you put your hand to the plough you have to keep moving forward and not look back'.

"Oh", I thought, my excuses dashed, and from then on I began to explore the road to ordination.

I had had a clear vision a year or so earlier of me going forward to be ordained when the first women were ordained Deacon in the Anglican Cathedral in Goulburn, but I had brushed it off saying "just because they're doing it, doesn't mean I have to."

Now, here I was, on the path to ordination, a long road it turned out, because of political infighting, but a calling followed nonetheless.

There is something in that though, putting your hand to the plough, putting your hand to the wheel, committing to something important and sticking with it through the tough times and the good times and moving forward, trusting. It's not that easy to stop myself looking back, but there is something about seeing it through once I have committed myself to something.

Last Sunday a group of us from Benedictus went for a walk, a bush walk on Mount Ainslie in Canberra, seeking a wonderful rustic labyrinth that has been there for almost 20 years, but is difficult to find.

With Margaret's leadership and Annie's Google Maps, we found it, a labyrinth made of sticks in the middle of the bush. And six of us walked the Labyrinth one after the other. After that, there was time for silence for 20 minutes or so. Instead of sitting still, I decided to walk the Labyrinth again. As I began to walk the Labyrinth I expressed my gratitude for so much in life, for being here in Canberra, for being here at Benedictus, for a roof over my head, warmth and purpose, happiness even, and so much more. When I got to the centre of the Labyrinth, I stopped and waited, and heard a voice within me say, "I have brought you here". I have brought you here. I suspect the voice was God, the Divine. I realised that finally, finally, I have landed here in this place at this point of ministry, and God, however you name God, has brought me here.

This journey has also been a long one, beginning just after Easter last year when I went on a retreat to Shoreham on the Mornington Peninsula. There, I walked the Labyrinth every day, on my walks to and from the ocean, and one day I had a sense of the word 'let go', 'let go of everything', so as I walked into the Labyrinth I began mentally to let go of everything, of my work, my relationships, my desires, my clothing, everything, to lay them all down in my mind, to release them and to stand in the centre of this Labyrinth in the bush, empty. At the centre of the Labyrinth, in my imagination, I was met by Jesus, who embraced me, held me, and said, "I am with you." I walked out of the Labyrinth, much lighter and began exploring the journey of letting go my identity, my role, my place in community, and moving home, to Canberra, to settle there.

So, last Sunday's labyrinth walk on Mt Ainslie with members of Benedictus, Sundays words to me, were a confirmation of that journey. After releasing everything just over twelve months earlier, I heard, 'I have brought you here.'

At our Benedictus online Music and Poetry Group a week or so ago we spent time with Janet Morley's poem - And You Held Me

This poem resonates for me with this journey I am on, maybe it will speak to you too:

and you held me and there were no words
and there was no time and you held me
and there was only wanting and
being held and being filled with wanting
and I was nothing but letting go
and being held
and there were no words and there
needed to be no words
and there was no terror only stillness
and I was wanting nothing and
it was fullness and it was like aching for God
and it was touch and warmth and
darkness and no time and no words and we flowed
and I flowed and I was not empty
and I was given up to the dark and
in the darkness I was not lost
and the wanting was like fullness and I could
hardly hold it and I was held and
you were dark and warm and without time and
without words and you held me¹

What a gift, being held.

¹ <https://prayerandverse.com/2017/02/10/and-you-held-me/>, accessed 25 June 2022

So what does it mean for me, for us, to put our hands to the plough, to move forward with our lives, with our ministry, being held? For me it means to lean into God, to trust, in this winter season in Australia, this season of hibernation and rest and reflection, nesting, cocooned, finally landed, happy to be here, ministering.

And those who have Covid have also been given that opportunity for stillness and reflection as healing and recovery slowly take place.

Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem. He was resolute, and turned away from his home place of Galilee, his comfort zone, towards trouble in Jerusalem. It is his path. I wonder how he feels, following his path to almost certain death? The second part of Luke's gospel tells the travelling story. He does not condemn others who reject him. In contrast to James and John, Jesus shows no desire for judgment to come upon the Samaritans who reject him because he is travelling to Jerusalem. Instead, he rebukes these two disciples for their perspective. Luke has already highlighted the divine mercy that surrounds the arrival of Jesus.

Jesus invites followers. 'I'll follow, but wait, first I have to...' Jesus pulls no punches, my way is itinerant, no comfortable resting places here. And, 'Let the dead bury their own dead,' he says. That's a bit harsh don't you think? He is counselling a look at our priorities, our commitment.. and, when you put your hand to the plough keep going forward, don't look back... enigmatic and strong replies to their procrastination, but he, himself keeps moving forward to Jerusalem.

I was delighted to read Sarah's Thursday reflections on the last six months. My sense is that Benedictus as a community is alive. We have work to do within ourselves, between ourselves, within our world as contemplatives with our practice of being openhearted and drawing close to the divine. And this practice opens us to others and to our world, to injustice and poverty.

Pope Francis says: 'The Church by her very nature is in motion; she does not stay sedentary and calm within her enclosure. She is open to the broadest horizons, sent forth—the Church is sent forth—to bring the Gospel through the streets and to reach the human and existential peripheries.'²

² Pope Francis, Angelus for 13 Ord C June 30, 2019

I am very excited about the possibility of a community project for a mural, just a dream at this time, which speaks of our history, of our connection, of the creek that runs by this place. Excited by the possibility of working with the local schools and First Nations peoples and Benedictus people to see what will emerge.

I am excited about creative offerings for winter and spring, like, 'simply alive', and a quiet evening with the finger labyrinth on zoom as well as a creative journal writing workshop on zoom, and offerings in Canberra like the mandala workshop and contemplative photography, and Jane and John Foulcher's 'Words Out of Silence: Finding the Poetic in Our Days'.

How can we serve our community as contemplatives? By being faithful to our practice, by listening, by noticing, by walking alongside, by continuing to move forward. 'Trust me' says God, in Noel Davis words in John Coleman's song of the same name:

TRUST ME

Trust me - launch into the deep
Into bliss – into blessing
Trust me – launch into the deep
Into confusion – into comedy
Trust me – launch into the deep
Into sadness – and your absurdity
Oh trust me

Trust me - launch into the deep
Into your ecstasy – your humanity
Trust me – launch into the deep
Into your wholeness – and your fragility
Trust me – launch into the deep
Into the diamond – into your crucible
Trust me – launch into the deep
Into your glory – and your tranquility
Oh trust me

Trust me - launch into the deep
Into your new life - thanksgiving
Trust me – launch into the deep
Into the maelstrom – the holy orchestra

Oh trust me

Trust me - launch into the deep

Into your bliss – into your blessing

Trust me - launch into the deep

Into your bliss – into your blessing

Words by Noel Davis © 2011 *Together at the Edge*;
Music by John Coleman © 2016 *Shade Tree Place*
<https://johncoleman.bandcamp.com/album/shade-tree-place>