



The Anglican Parish of Whangaparaoa Peninsula
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Sermon

Knowing when to Paddle

1 Samuel 14:1-17, 20-23; 2 Corinthians 6:1-2; Luke 10:1-2

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Have you surfed or bodyboarded? If so, you know there is a right time to paddle to catch a wave. What about investing additional money into a fund? You can try and predict the moment when you can buy in most cheaply and watch the value soar – but it is very difficult to do. Another approach is to invest small amounts regularly and allow long term averaging to smooth out the peaks and troughs for you.

Ecclesiastes 11:4,6 Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. ... ⁶ Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.

In other words, if you always worry about whether it might rain you will never act. You have to take a risk and get on with it.

The Church has a mission¹. There is a right time to apply ourselves to it. When is that? Let's look at the Scriptures.

1 Samuel 14

Any Day

¹*One day Jonathan son of Saul said to the young man bearing his armour, "Come, let's go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side."*

'One day...' What is of note that it was no special day. When is it time for victory? Any day on which we will believe and act!

Passivity

²*Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gibeah ...with him were about six hundred men ...*

Do you remember in the David and Goliath account, the two armies were drawn up opposite each other. Each day, Goliath would taunt the Hebrews. Yet neither army would attack. They were stuck, afraid to

¹ Matthew 28:18-20

move. At this earlier time, the same thing has happened. Saul was waiting with over 600 men but not acting. For as long as we sit passively in fear and discouragement, nothing will happen.

Radical Faith

⁶ *Jonathan said to his young armour-bearer, "Come, let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few."*

These guys had radical faith! It takes some courage to climb a cliff and attack a guard post. Even more when they know you are coming. But Jonathan had the faith, a deep faith, to believe that if he acted God would act too. He was right - God responds to radical faith.

Two are better than one

⁷ *"Do all that you have in mind," his armour-bearer said. "Go ahead; I am with you, heart and soul."*

Not only did Jonathan have faith, but his armour bearer encouraged him. What an affirmation, "I am with you, heart and soul." You want someone like that with you when taking big risks. It builds our courage to have others with us. Remember, in the gospel reading, Jesus sent the disciples out in pairs. It is the same principle of companionship and mutual encouragement. Too often, in our individualistic culture we think we have to do it alone when we need the support of others.

Laying a Fleece

⁸ *Jonathan said, "Come, then; we will cross over toward the men and let them see us ... if they say, 'Come up to us,' we will climb up, because that will be our sign that the LORD has given them into our hands."*

They decided to 'lay out a fleece.' A fleece is a test by which God may show his will in a circumstance. It is named from when Gideon asked God to confirm his will by causing a sheep's fleece lying on the ground to be dry when the dew made the ground around it wet as a proof that he had spoken to Gideon.

In this case, Jonathan chose the form of the challenge from the guards. If they invite them up, they will take it as a sign that God is with them. Actually, it is a weak fleece, because it was more likely that would happen than that the guards would come down to them. What was impressive is that he assumed they should go unless God told them to stop. Do we assume that? There is a general instruction of "Go into all the world!" Perhaps we need to be more ready to believe the instruction is 'go' unless we are told otherwise.

Risk rewarded!

¹³ *Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet, with his armour-bearer right behind him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armour-bearer followed and killed behind him.*

There was a risk in stepping out, but nothing could happen unless they did. As it was they had a victory.

God can do more than we imagine

¹⁵ *Then panic struck the whole army-- those in the camp and field, and those in the outposts and raiding parties-- and the ground shook. It was a panic sent by God.*

More than just a local victory, God did far more than Jonathan could have imagined. He caused the ground to shake and sent a panic among the Philistines. In their fear they were confused and this led to a greater victory as the main Hebrew force got involved:

²⁰ *Then Saul and all his men assembled and went to the battle. They found the Philistines in total confusion, striking each other with their swords. ...²³ So the LORD rescued Israel that day.*

Healing on the Streets

In a small way it reminds me of the experience Helen and I had of going out to offer healing in public places last year. It was not, of course, as risky as Jonathan's exploit was. But there are parallels in the value of going in a team, of taking a risk and seeing God at work. Next weekend, there is a local opportunity when an experienced leader is coming to train those interested from the combined churches. He will instruct us in some practical pointers and provide a team of experienced people to help churches here find the courage

and confidence to go outside and meet people. We expect to meet people at a point of need and offer to prayer for them and see God take action.

Like Saul and Jonathan, If we stay home, nothing happens. If we go out something may happen and God may act in that something! But don't worry if that is too challenging – it is not part of the Hope Project. The Hope Project is much gentler and less threatening. It only asks us to talk to people we would talk to anyway about a TV item or a booklet they have read.

2 Corinthians 6

Turning to 2 Corinthians, in this part of the letter, Paul has just spoken about our salvation². It is neither casual nor trivial. We are a new creation. We are transformed from the inside out. On the cross Jesus exchanged his righteousness for our sin. We become Christ's ambassadors on earth.

Paul quotes from Isaiah 49, "In the time of my favour I heard you, and in the day of salvation I helped you." When is the special time of favour? We heard last Sunday night from the New Wine speaker, Andrea Wigglesworth, that God is declaring favour over New Zealand in 2014 – this is a year of God's favour!

When is the day of salvation? Paul says to both, NOW! "Now is the time of God's favour; now is the day of salvation."

That is a significant passage for me. In 1997, we were praying about whether we should go to England. On a certain Sunday, a member of the congregation gave a prophetic word to me about being pruned so that I might be more fruitful. Afterwards I went to the lectern to put away the microphone and my eye fell on a verse in 2 Corinthians which spoke to me clearly of leaving. I said, "Yes, Lord, when?" My eyes fell on this verse: "Now is the acceptable time." Both verses struck me with a strong witness that God was speaking to me through them. We immediately started making arrangements to go to England.

As an aside, that word about being pruned did not make sense to me for some years. I later realised that pruning is also arranging the vine for the best exposure to sun and air – that is training. Amazingly, on my last Sunday in England, a vicar gave me another word, which said, I had been pruned and trained and was being sent to bear much fruit! Don't despise prophetic words you don't understand.

Luke 10

In the gospel reading, Jesus commissioned 72 disciples to go out to preach, heal and deliver. He told them the harvest was plentiful but the workers were few. They should ask for more workers to be sent out into the harvest. He wasn't addressing the apostles but the ordinary followers. These were the 'little-old-mes' like you and me. Jesus sent them as well as the apostles. Jesus sends little-old-me-n-you too!

- When is it time to respond to God? Today! (Any day –but preferably now rather than later.)
- When is it time the turn our lives around and live more fully for Christ? Today!
- When was it time for Jonathan to attack the philistines? That day!
- So when is it time to turn our focus toward sharing Christ? Today!
- The harvest is plentiful and ready. The opportunities are now! What is needed is workers.
- 'NOW is the time of God's favour. NOW is the day of salvation.'

Application: 'Jesus –all about hope!' is an outstanding opportunity –and is rapidly approaching! This is an opportunity such as we have not seen before. There is a reason to tell people about the gospel on this significant bicentenary. Others will plough and sow seed: reasons for faith will be shared, and the gospel will be publicly presented. It will be done through multiple forms of media – time is booked on TV1, 2,

² 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

3, Prime, Maori and several Sky channels. There will be booklets through the letterboxes, website and social media.

All we need to do is catch this wave, and we will benefit!

Everything will be done to present us with interested people. We only need to enquire and talk about what everyone is seeing.

What can we do?

1. Pray! There is a bulletin to help give us focus. Pray for non-Christian friends and for people living in your street especially as we come to the delivery stage 12-26 October.
2. Give! Thank you for giving already! The cost of the project is \$1.3million and so far \$922,000 is raised. That leaves \$378,000 to go. (This project only costs 90c per home).
3. Prepare! Over the next 8 weeks we will focus the sermons and homegroup materials on equipping you for this opportunity. The project will give the 'content' (reasons to believe, a gentle gospel presentation). All we need to do is water this seed and – with our prayer – God will bring the harvest.

Hope Project equipping series, the titles of the coming messages being:

- *Conversations that connect* – 4 sermons
- *Telling your story*
- *The Power of an Invitation*
- Follow up – *Leaving the 99*
- *Are you ready?*

Programs don't reach people. People reach people. So our involvement could be the difference between someone hearing of Christ and considering Christ - or not.

- Let's focus on prayer!
- We all have many loved ones we desire to see come to faith.
- TV and booklets will be in their houses.
- Let's pray –and prepare ourselves to encourage others to consider the questions this project will raise about God.