

Since the time when I became a minister, I've always enjoyed Sunday birthdays - after all it's the only day of the week I work and working on my birthday has a nice sacrificial sound to it - you do it more often than I do. As you see, I share this birthday with Glenys Geytenbeek, Jack Caldwell and Judy Kingham.

Sometimes around my birthday, I get a little reflective, I think about where I've come from and where I'm going - how my faith journey began, how it's gone, how it's going and what I need to face up to.

As I thought about this, the idea came to me - what Bible texts have I built my life on/what Bible texts do I build my life on? Today, on the day I hover between the end of the mid-60s and the beginning of the late 60s, I'd like to focus on some of the texts that God has brought to life in me, texts that have been and continue to be foundational over the not quite 54 years I've been following Jesus - sometimes a lot closer than at other times.

I'd also like to hand you out a piece of paper with room for your texts and what I'd like us to do over the 4 weeks from May 15 to June 5 is to hear from several of you as to what your texts are. Next week is Mothers' Day and we have a special guest speaker flying in from Leckhampton Court. The following four Sundays, our focus beginning on Pentecost Sunday is on the Holy Spirit - at work in us, among us and the world. Then on June 12 we begin our Prayer and Self-Denial season with an emphasis on both. When we conclude that season on 3 July, it will nearly be time to get back to our friend Luke - we only got most of the first 9 chapters completed last year. But we may continue to share our texts to build a life on long after these 4 weeks. Somewhere in the month of June we will also appropriately farewell Martin and Diane on the next stage of their adventure with God.

It was during the August school holidays in 1962 when I had my first taste, with understanding, of the Holy Spirit speaking to me. What I'm saying isn't new to some. Les Armstrong, formerly the minister at South Dunedin Baptist, was the speaker at a boys' camp at Pleasant Valley. On the last morning he invited those who were interested in following Jesus to come and talk to him. Today as I look back I'm not sure I knew what he meant but there was a tugging in my mind, in my spirit; **now**, I'd say it was the gentle nudging of the Holy Spirit telling me to go. All Les did was explain this verse to the 5 of us.

### John 3:16

**16 For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.**

I do remember kneeling down and in 13-14 year old words thanking the Lord for helping me to believe in him - four others were in the room at the same time. It didn't happen at that moment but later I felt as if I'd been in a dark room all my life and someone had come in and turned the lights on - I saw things I'd not seen before with regard to Jesus and to my life. I came back from the camp and told Mum and Dad in a roundabout way what had happened - I was shy then. They said later the minister would like to talk to me - as hopefully I'll be doing with some young people very soon. I have to say the minister hasn't contacted me yet. But I'm not sitting in judgement on him because often I don't get it right.

Three years later I was baptised, sensing this was the Lord's call on my life. I was baptised by Cliff Reay, who, incidentally, baptised my mother at Mornington 33 years before this. Two things I remember about that day are that Dad and Mum were there (they lived a long way away) and shortly afterwards we became members of the church together; the other is that I felt like a brand new person inside.

Over the following months the Lord used Cliff Reay to sow the idea in my spirit that the pastoral and teaching ministry may be where the Lord would lead me. That idea/thought/word never left me. I felt very close to God at times, not so at other times and then when I started university I began doing Bible Study with other young men at Opawa Baptist.

Part of the deal was that we memorised Bible verses and this next verse was one of the first I memorised. I feel now that in its application, it marked the completion of the beginning of my journey to becoming a Christian – a journey I'm still on.

### **1 John 5:11-12**

**11 And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.**

It was at that point I believe I received what might be called the assurance of salvation - not quite in John Wesley's words, but similar. The next three years, along with others, we memorised much scripture, read the Bible from cover to cover, witnessed in the pre-earthquake Christchurch Square (and other places), served the Lord in youth ministry and I was opportunities to preach. All this happening while I was in Christchurch to complete a degree in history and train to be a secondary school teacher – I had time then.

It was during those years Jesus' call to discipleship became stronger. I was with a group of young adults who were very keen to know God's calling on their lives – it's amazing looking back how many of that group went on to serve Jesus in a whole range of ways. In these years one of Jesus' invitations in Luke really caught my attention.

### **Luke 9:23-25**

**23 Then he said to them all: 'Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will save it. 25 What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit their very self?**

This was something I could give my life to – follow Jesus through his world; let go of petty dreams and aspirations – having a centre and a direction. Can I say to those who younger than me, much younger than me, that if you don't get caught up in Jesus' purposes for you, you'll settle for something far less?

(As an aside I'd like to say that not all my dreams were petty. As a teenager I used to dream of marrying Trudy, even though deep down I thought it was impossible – she was far too good for me – as my mother often reminded me – before and after we were married)

I didn't always find following Jesus that easy, sometimes I got side-tracked by my own stuff; sometimes I wondered where God was in all this. I can look back now and see the times when I took my eyes off Jesus – to use the image in Luke of following him. It was as a consequence of those decisions that I wondered if God really was interested in me and the direction my life should take. That's when the truth of Philippians 1:6 became important to me.

### **Philippians 1:6**

**6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.**

The context is where Paul begins his letter to the Christian community at Philippi; he thanks God for them, prays for them, and rejoices in what God is doing in them.

He's glad they're committed to the things he's committed to and wants to assure them that God is on their side. Is this a verse for you?

Another way of looking at this is why did Jesus call me to follow him? After all just in case I forget, I didn't call him, he called me and he calls us.

## John 15:16

**16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit – fruit that will last – and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you.**

There's a theme here – a life in which God is at work, and a life of fruitfulness: the fruit of other believers, the fruit of loving acts, the fruit of obedience, the fruit of effective praying – all there. I think deep down we want our days to count – well I trust so. Surely you don't want to be like the person in the Somerset Maugham novel 'Of Human Bondage'?

***'His death had been as futile as his life. He died ingloriously, of a stupid disease, failing once more, even at the end, to accomplish anything. It was just the same now as if he had never lived.'***

Fruit grows out of a life spent in harmony with God and his Son Jesus.

Along the way I had experiences of the Holy Spirit – still do – had one in the hospital on Tuesday afternoon; another on Thursday night. Because I came to faith in the heady days of the Charismatic movement, there was a lot of emphasis on having the 'correct' charismatic experience. I thank God we've got beyond that because the Holy Spirit works in each of us in different ways but there is one text that created in me a longing for God then – it still does.

## John 7:37-9

**37 On the last and greatest day of the festival, Jesus stood and said in a loud voice, 'Let anyone who is thirsty come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as Scripture has said, rivers of living water will flow from within them.' 39 By this he meant the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were later to receive. Up to that time the Spirit had not been given, since Jesus had not yet been glorified.**

The Holy Spirit hasn't been given as a personal blessing. Thirst yes, drink yes, but then be a channel of the Lord's blessing – rivers of living water flowing from us. A wonderful picture of a life open to the Holy Spirit generously sharing that life around – isn't that the kind of person you long to be?

My concluding text takes a big jump – what is this all for, where is this all leading, what is the purpose of God being at work in us.

## SLIDE VII Revelation 21:1-6

**3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look! God's dwelling-place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'**

**5 He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!'**

I love declaring this truth at the celebration of a person's life where that person has walked with the Lord.

I love these truths:

- That ultimately God will be with his people, with us
- That there will be no more tears of sorrow, tears of pain or tears of loss
- That the old order of things will pass away
- That our God will make everything new

There are, of course, many Biblical texts and truths I haven't touched on today – this is a sample of the truths that God has built and is building into my life.

So please take your work on seriously, please take time before the Lord to think about the texts that have been foundational for you – and we'll have a great time listening to one another over the weeks of Pentecost.

### **Blessing**

**'The Lord bless you**

**and keep you;**

**25 the Lord make his face shine on you**

**and be gracious to you;**

**26 the Lord turn his face towards you**

**and give you peace.**