

This week I have been thinking to myself – ‘Do things really ever change?’

Back in the early 1970’s, almost 40 years ago, I sat in the comfort of my new home in Browns Bay and watched a child die in its mother’s arms from starvation. There was a drought and famine in Ethiopia.

I wept.

Just a few years before the Americans had put a man on the moon. Humanity could spend millions on a feat such as this, but could not reach out with compassion and save one of its own.

It seemed so unjust that I should be living in such luxury and the powers that be can invest so much in technology and war, whilst so many on this planet did not even have water and the basic needs for survival.

It was one of those watershed moments in my life. I determined that I was going to work for a more just world.

It was not long after that I too was confronted by the reality of death through the sudden loss of someone close to me in a road accident and I was propelled into a lifelong journey for the meaning of life, a journey that I am still on....

It has been sobering and alarming to see the same images of those I saw 40 years ago of despairing mothers holding their famished children who are little more than skin and bones in the newspapers again in recent days.

There is another drought, another famine and this time we are commemorating the closure of another space programme, the space shuttle, a programme that has cost billions of dollars – and still we cannot save one of our own from starvation in Ethiopia...

Do things ever really change?

I could easily despair and think that my belief in a God of justice and compassion is just a waste of time and that any attempts I might make ‘to make a difference’ are futile.

I must admit I often wonder – as I said I am still on that journey to find meaning and I am in no doubt it is a journey I will continue to make until my last breath and maybe beyond...

It is so often in our faith stories that I find hope, that even in the midst of human failing, the purposes of God do break through and find fulfilment somewhere along the line.

The continuing story of the Abraham's descendants is a wonderful example of this:

God promised Abraham he would be the father of a nation. In their old age they had no children...

Messengers of God assure Abraham Sarah will fall pregnant. She is 90 and laughs at the prospect (who wouldn't!). But indeed she bears Isaac.

Isaac marries Rebekah – they are married for 20 years and have no children, but again the promise is fulfilled and in their later years they bear twins, Esau and Jacob.

This is a hugely dysfunctional family. The parents have favourites and the boys hate each other. There is treachery when Jacob deceives both his father and his brother and gains the family birthright and inheritance.

Jacob flees the wrath of his brother Esau and ends up at Haran, the place where Abraham was first given the promise from God that he would be the father of a great nation.

You will remember from last week's reading that Jacob had a dream of angels, or messengers coming to and fro from God's realm to this earthly one. God again affirms the same promise that was given to Abraham - that through Jacob there will be a nation of people who will fulfil the purposes of God.

And then in today's reading there is more deceit and treachery. Jacob falls in love with his cousin Rachel and he works seven years for her (and they seemed but a few days his love for her is so great!). But he gets tricked into marrying Rachel's older sister Leah – uncle Laban wants to maintain honour in the family by ensuring that his older daughter is married first.

Jacob works another seven years and takes Rachel as his wife also – polygamy was the order of the day in these times. It ensured a larger family!

The promise of God is simple – Abraham will be the father of a great nation – a nation that will fulfil the purposes of God.

The outworking of that is done in the midst of human frailty and uncertainty; of treachery and deceit; of dysfunctionality of every kind.

A story of hope indeed...

This year marks the anniversary of two watershed moments in our history as a nation.

It is 30 years since the infamous Springbok tour of 1981. Then people stood up and said that apartheid was wrong and that the tour was simply encouraging a corrupt regime.

Supporters of the tour maintained that sport had nothing to do with politics.

Attitudes have changed enormously in that 30 years. Apartheid has been exposed as the evil for which it is and I heard a sports commentator on Friday say that no one would now accept that national sport and politics are not inextricably mixed. He would have been drummed off the airways for saying that in 1981!

The second anniversary is that of the Homosexual Law Reform Bill that was passed 25 years ago in 1986.

Again this caused huge controversy opponents maintaining it would change the very fabric of our society and New Zealand would become a cess pit of debauchery...

Of course that has not happened.

Again I was encouraged to hear on the radio this week that a survey of New Zealanders has found that over 56% of the population sees nothing wrong and is indeed in favour of marriage between two people of the same gender.

That percentage increases to 75% in the under 35 age group. It is clear that for the younger generation same sex relationships are simply a non-issue.

These two matters are issues of justice and integrity; the John Mintos and the Fran Wildes of this nation are messengers of God whether they know it or not!

This Sunday is also Social Services Sunday. There are moves afoot to radically change the delivery of social services in this country.

I am not adverse to a robust discussion about social and welfare services, however I become alarmed at the notion that people with young children be forced to look for work and that the onus of disability shifts from what a person cannot do to what a person can do...

...as it is there are not enough jobs to go round and such actions will only put more pressure on already fragile people, let alone the frontline staff that have to administer such policies.

As a people of God we need to hold to the principles of fairness, justice, integrity and compassion; we need to listen to those people who stand with the poor, the disadvantaged and the marginalised – they are messengers of God – angels if you will...

...and we need to listen to our stories of faith and from them draw hope that even in the midst of human frailty the fullness of God's realm will come.

Indeed as Jesus put's it ' The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed that someone sowed in a field; it is the smallest of all the seeds, but when it has grown it is the greatest of shrubs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and make nests in its branches" ....

Do things really ever change?

I hope that one day humanity will have the courage and tenacity to ensure a just sharing of resources; that weapons of war will be converted into ploughshares; that the lion will lie down with the lamb; that the rich will be laid low and the humble and poor raised up...

This is my hope; this is what my God has promised; this is the faith I will continue to carry as I continue my journey and search....