

## ***Holy Orders (Searching for Sunday, chaps 13,14, 15 and 16) – Ephesians 4:1-7,11-16 and John 13:3-17***

We are continuing- as David Deal said here last Sunday – with our series on Rachel Held Evans’ book – *Searching for Sunday*. (*Can I just say, the ‘backup pastor’ was great! If you’re wondering what I’m referring to – go back and listen to Dave’s sermon!*) And in this section of *Searching for Sunday*, we are looking at the sacrament of Holy Orders, of commissioning particular people for ministry, but as Dave said last week – the main emphasis of the New Testament is that all of us are commissioned for ministry. All of us are given gifts to give to others. All of us are called.

My favourite ‘call story’ is one about my friend Vikki who started coming to Seaforth Baptist in Sydney while I was there. Vikki grew up Catholic, but when she left school, she left church and faith behind. But in her mid-thirties – married to a lovely man with three children and a great career in public relations she felt something was still missing. So, she decided – not to find a Catholic church – but to go to whatever church was nearest to their home and Seaforth Baptist beat the Anglicans by 85 metres!

Around this time her family took a major road trip, across Australia, with a group of friends, and, because it was new and rather strange to all of them, Vikki now identifying as a Christianity often came up in conversation. One day, driving along an unusually good bit of road, a friend in another car radioed, *“Vikki, how about you ask God when they put this road in!”*

Vikki was working out how to respond when a voice broke in, *“G’day. It’s God. I can tell you the first bit of road – a bullock track – was in the 1890’s.”*

There was sudden radio silence, and then everyone relaxed, and for the next half hour or so proceeded to ask ‘God’ questions. *“When was it sealed? How many people live around here? What was it like to live there?”* etc.

Then another voice broke in, *“This is God’s wife. If he doesn’t stop larking around on the radio and get home for lunch, he’ll miss out. Over and out.”* End of conversation.

I love this story because although (spoiler alert) it was not God on the radio, it happened at a time in Vikki’s life when the call of God came through loud and clear and she committed herself, as Ephesians 4 says, to *“leading a life worthy of the call to which she had been called...”*

There are two things I want to say about that call – *“the call to which we have [all] been called”* – as Dave said last Sunday (*Dave, you’ll be disappointed in me. I only have two points!*)

**Firstly, the call to follow Christ is not a call to be an individual.** We are not expected to hear some word from God and to chart a life of serving God

alone. **The call to Christ Jesus is a call we hear together. It is a call we hear collectively.**

We are called collectively, Ephesians tells us, to Christian living, *“humility and gentleness, patience, bearing with one another in love”*. We are called collectively to Christian community, *“to making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”*. We are *“one body and one Spirit”*. And we are called collectively to Christian witness, *“the one hope of our calling, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all!”*

I have sat with many people over the years concerned they do not have an archetypal ‘call to Christian faith story’. They have not heard any voices. They have not seen any flashing lights. But it’s not about that. It’s about our collective call to be the Body of Christ and our response to that call together. All of us have different experiences and all of us, Ephesians goes on to say, have different gifts - gifts we are not meant to hoard for ourselves, but to share; *“...to equip the saints for the work of ministry, [to build] up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.”*

Coming back to Vikki. Despite her many gifts, she was not called to minister for God on her own. She was called in the context of the wider call to the church – and she did that at Seaforth Baptist and until very recently at Micah Australia - and in this way she has been part of helping the church/the body of Christ to grow. As Ephesians says, *“building itself up in love.”*

I have been looking at a cartoon this week that appears in many forms and many places. The first frame is called ‘Your Plan’ and looks like this... I think we could rename it, ‘What you think God’s call is...’



I’ll get to the second frame in a moment, but really ‘what God’s call is’ - is actually this!



We are all called, as Dave said last week, and we are called collectively – to be Christ’s body in the world.

**The second thing I want to say about the call of Christ the call continues – undiminished, and it is a consistent call – an insistent call if you like – that comes to us, as the Body of Christ, regardless of our circumstances.** The one constant throughout our lives is the call of God to us and the one constant throughout the history of the church is the call to embody the love and the love and the love and the love of God.

In chapter 14 of this section on Holy Orders, Rachel Held Evans describes an experience, with others, of establishing a new church in Dayton (Ohio) – one

that would be *authentic, intentional, and missional*. “*Slippery buzzwords*”, she writes, “*we said we hated, but which we still invoked from time to time because they reflected our truest hopes and dreams...*”

In April 2010 they began; “*dreaming big dreams...[talking] about partnering with the local public school for after-school tutoring programs, arranging our imagined sanctuary so that people sit around circular tables instead of pews, sending a missions team to Uganda, curating exhibits for local artists, living simply so that others may simply live. We were idealistic and committed. We were hopeful and brave. We were being the change we seek in the world, and we were, to a person broke.*”

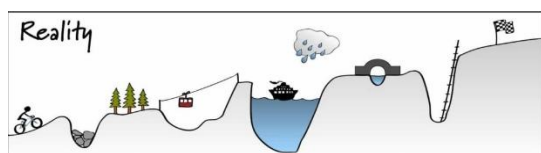
Over the next year, she charts the life of the church: June 2010 their first baptism; October 2010 a move into new premises, while struggling to engage more people; February 2011 volunteering at a program providing free non-emergency care for those on low incomes. One year after they started, in April 2011, she records their final service. With insufficient numbers and insufficient finances and insufficient energy they’d realised they could not go on.

“It’s strange,” she says in the next chapter, “*that Christians so rarely talk about failure when we claim to follow a guy whose three year ministry was cut short by his crucifixion....But as nearly every denomination in the United States faces declining membership and waning influence, Christians may need to get used to the idea of measuring significance by something other than money, fame or power. No one ever said the fruit of the Spirit is **relevance** or **impact** or even **revival**. The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control....*”

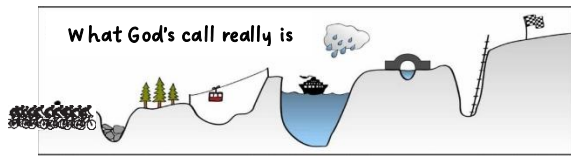
And then she reflects on how their church – although it failed - still produced fruit. “*We baptised,*” she writes, “*broke bread, preached the Word, and confessed our sins. We created a sanctuary where people told the truth without fear. We fed the hungry and filled out paperwork with the sick. We worked through our differences with care and grace. And we learned the hard way that church is not static....*”



Coming back to the cartoon, the first frame was called ‘Your Plan’ (or in the amended version ‘What you think God’s call is’). The second is titled ‘Reality’.



It is, as Evans writes, learning the hard way that church – that our life as a church - is not static.



(We should add in our peloton and the title 'What God's call really is' !) Because responding to God's call – as a church - is a lot like this.

It is a lot like setting out together and discovering that at the bottom of the first exhilarating downhill is a rocky landing. It's about making our way through the forest. It's about the unexpected cable car that lifts us above the valley. It's about the boat ride we take across the sea and through the storm. It's about crossing bridges together. And it's about long hard climbs when we need to encourage one another to keep going.

It's about all the experiences Evans describes of church. Those of you who've been around Canberra Baptist for a while – would you say this is also your experience of this church? And would you also say that the call of Christ to the church has continued in all the ups and downs and sigs and zags – that the call of Christ has been constant? Do you share Evans' conclusion that church is found when, *"the kingdom of God draws near, when a meal, a story, a song, an apology, and even a failure is made holy by the presence of Jesus among us and within us..."*?

For among us and within us, the call of Christ continues – the call that commissions all of us, the call that calls us collectively to be a body of love in the world, the call that comes consistently, in whatever season or circumstance the church finds itself, and continues to surprise us when the caller is found kneeling, with a basin and towel, washing our feet.

Can I invite you to sing a song we learned at camp last weekend – *Bind us together within your love*. Please just join in as you feel comfortable!