

## February 8<sup>th</sup> Sexagesima Sunday.

Vicar Joyce.

*Isaiah 40: 21-31.1, Corinthians 9: 16-23, Mark 1: 29-39*

There are 93 women mentioned in the Bible; 49 are named.

Today we hear of Simon Peter's mother in law. Unnamed, but she was a first.

The walk to where Simon and Andrew live from the synagogue is a short one, easily taken on the Sabbath. James and John walk into the house like familiar guests. It is a family home. Three generations live there. It is also the headquarters of a small family fishing business. There are nets in the yard and the smell of yesterday's fish.

The home is in turmoil. The two sets of brothers are going to follow Jesus in his ministry. They have a new purpose in their life. They are planning to leave for now, abandon their fishing careers and forsake what is familiar. The family income will be affected. The matriarch of the house has taken to her bed. Her temperature is high, her face flushed, her hands are moist, she is running a fever. There is an anxious hush. Simon's wife is torn with love for Simon, his sense of calling and concern for her mother.

Jesus walks across to the sick one. He looks at her, takes her hand and lifts her up, healed and renewed. We do not hear their conversation. In Mark 1: 13 the Greek word diakoneo is used to describe how the angels minister to Jesus in the wilderness. The same word is used of the mother-in-law. She gives a reciprocal ministry. She serves, she ministers and she becomes the hostess. It is a short walk from her bed of sickness to the kitchen of hospitality. Jesus broke two cultural rules. He healed on the Sabbath and he touched a sick person.

This woman is the first woman recorded as ministering to Jesus. To this day the church has an order of deacons, people who serve. Isaiah calls forth each of them by name. I wish Mark had thought to record Peter's mother in law's name.

Last week you heard of the news of my retirement. That news caused anxiety to some parishioners. Some were angry. Life will change, but the parish continues.

I have not heard of anyone going to bed on receiving the news of my retirement, which is great. People have asked if the Op Shop will close. Will the Selwyn Centre continue?

We anticipate that the ministries of the parish will continue and hopefully develop further. John and I are concerned too about our future plans. However, this is not a time for us all to fear, but to trust in Jesus' care. Please raise directly with us any issues you have rather than listening to what may be unreliable third-hand incorrect information.

Change brings uncertainty, but turn it into opportunity and change moves from fear to hope; from anxiety to excitement.

At dusk after a hard day, just when Jesus wanted to rest, he was sought out by the whole city. He was compassionate and responded to the crowd's needs.

Early next morning Jesus goes to the wilderness to pray and to wait with God. He was exhausted; he needed time to think about where God's call would take him.

Should he stay with this crowd? He was successful. They seemed to seek after him or were they only interested in miracles and dramatic happenings? He found some clarity. His call was to go to other places in Galilee and preach to them also. Jesus was never dazzled or seduced by the adulation of a crowd. Jesus found prayer strengthening and he found guidance.

I wonder if Jesus had thought of the Isaiah passage. Do you not know? Have you not heard? We might say this to a person who has missed out on hearing news.

Isaiah is calling the people of God, in exile, to faith. He reminds them of God's creative greatness. From God's point of view all people, rulers and slaves were like grasshoppers, yet were known by name. The people had been in slavery in Babylon for nearly 5 decades. God had energy. Wait on God, who would renew their strength. How those in captivity must have envied the eagles who had freedom, who could soar away majestically and go away from Babylon.

God has a tender heart for the vulnerable. God empowers the faint. We have all seen young people tired at the end of a race or a game. We can identify with Jesus with his feeling overwhelmed and tired. Picture yourself as resting with God as he did and being renewed. Soar with new life.