

## **Life begins to have meaning when we are intentional and focused**

### **Luke 14: 25-33**

This week I came across a word not heard frequently in normal conversation; the word '*volitional*'. It occurred in an article by Catholic theologian Fr John Shea when he referred to Jesus' life as being in '*volitional unity*' with God. We will come back to '*volitional unity*' in a few minutes time.

I wish to thank Lorraine Macknight for playing the organ for us this morning at relatively short notice – I'd forgotten that both Hildegarde and Ian, our two organists for the second and third Sundays, are both travelling in Europe this month as members of a choir – and so Lorraine came to my rescue. More particularly, I wish to thank Lorraine for sharing her passion for organ playing and hymnology a few moments ago, and in explaining the ways in which the hymns we sing help to inform our theology and assist in the transmission of culture.

But it also became clear as Lorraine spoke, I sense, the discipline and commitment needed to develop her musical skills as an organist, and of the passion she feels for hymnology that prompted Lorraine to research its influence so intentionally.

Lorraine has been focused and intentional with specific goals in mind; to develop her musical talent as a contribution to worship and to deepen her understanding of how worship and faith can be deepened through music and song. (Let us never take for granted the contribution our organists, Lorraine, David Franks, Hildegarde Palafox, Ian Kummerow, Terry Birtles, and those who have accompanied us in the past, have made to our worship.)

Indeed the contribution of our musicians is a timely illustration for the Gospel reading we heard a few minutes ago when Jesus suggested no builder worth their salt would start constructing a building if they couldn't complete it, or a king declare war on another nation if not sure of a successful outcome. Jesus is suggesting that our lives in relationship with God need to be focused, intentional and disciplined. At some point in our lives we need to commit ourselves to some purpose and see it through to completion.

What we know to be true with music and the arts, and for that matter, sport, is also true for the religious dimension of our lives: Spiritual growth and wholeness comes through focused disciplined effort and intentional design.

And so we come back to the word '*volition*' referred to at the beginning, and John Shea's suggestion that Jesus' life was in volitional unity with God. '*Volition*' is derived from the Latin word '*volo*' which means 'I wish, I will.' It is an act of '*willing*' or '*resolving*' to undertake some task or make a commitment to someone, a decision made after careful consideration or deliberation.

When Jesus turns his head toward Jerusalem his life is in volitional unity with God; he finds his identity in relationship with God when his life is focused, intentional, committed and at one with God's love and will for the world. We too discover our identity through commitment to a goal, when our lives are in volitional unity with God.

I personally remember the loneliest period in my life occurred when I was in my late twenties and, although outwardly successful in my career with lots of friends around me, I nonetheless felt a quiet desperation as though something was missing, that somehow I lacked direction or understanding of how I fitted into the '*bigger picture*' of life around me; a lack of direction or purpose.

During university days and my transition into early professional life I had kept attending church, retaining faith which was in my DNA, if you like, through the formative influence of my parents and Christian

community. Nonetheless I had somehow lost my way, though never losing trust, and through that experience my faith was strengthened and new direction found.

Such times of crisis are almost an inevitable part of human experience. And the religious dimension of life is about reawakening within us an understanding of the 'bigger picture', that we come and go within a larger mystery, to find purpose and meaning for our lives in volitional unity with God; to reawaken within ourselves an awareness that we share in the outworking of God's love and concern for the world.

Perhaps it would be good for each of us this morning to ask what it means for our lives to be in volitional unity with God. If our identity – our sense of who we are – lies in relationship with God, as expressed so beautifully for us this morning by the psalmist: *Lord, you have searched me out and known me...you discern my thoughts from afar.....and are acquainted with all my ways...*, what then are the tasks we are called to pursue through to completion so that our lives have purpose and meaning in 'volitional unity' with Christ through whom we are fully 'known'.

And if we think such tasks or goals are only for young people, let me share with you a story about volitional unity with God.

It was time for the monsoon rains to begin and a very old man was digging holes in his garden.

"What are you doing?" his neighbour asked.

"Planting mango trees" was the reply.

"Do you honestly expect to eat mangoes from those trees?"

"No. I won't live long enough for that. But others will. It occurred to me the other day that all my life I have enjoyed mangoes planted by other people. This is my way of showing them my gratitude."

Such is life lived in volitional unity with God.            Amen