**Sermon May 18th 2014 - 1 Pet 2:2-10**

**Rutherford Waddell**

As I’ve mentioned a few times this year already, 2014 marks the 200th anniversary since Christianity came to NZ, and we’re going to have a gathering at the manse on Thursday evenings starting in 2 weeks time where we view and discuss a DVD resource that tells something of that story – it’s highs and its lows.

I therefore thought I’d try to whet your appetites in the lead up to that, by doing 2 historic sermons looking at figures from the history of our faith in this land, this week and next.

But first, here is the trailer for the study…

*Trailer…*

Now this anniversary is one that is shared across the Christian church in NZ regardless of denomination*,* but in these sermons I want to look at Presbyterians of old – because , although it pains me to admit it, the Presbyterian Church just isn’t cool!

It doesn’t have much in the way of street-cred, and so, the Presbyterian history isn’t often told.

There’s lots of examples of this:

- Such as… if you happen to watch your average horror movie, there is almost always a clergy-man who almost always dies – but it’s always a Catholic priest!

*(Has anyone ever seen a Presbyterian in a movie?)*

- If there’s a civic event like the anniversary of the Chch earthquake, who’s asked to do it? Not the Presbyterians. They’re probably worried a Presy minister would just preach a sermon at them, while at least Anglican priests would wear a bit of bling, bring some pretty pictures to look at, and might even swing some incense around.

- This even goes to the extent, that when I went to Te Papa once to look at their exhibit detailing the history of Scottish immigration to NZ (Scotland being where the Presbyterian Church comes from, and the denomination of the vast majority of Scottish settlers) the word “Presbyterian” is so ‘un-hip’ that it didn’t even get mentioned once!

I was amazed how they managed to do that…

So, today we remedy this with a cool Presbyterian, Rev **Rutherford Waddell**, minister at St Andrew’s in Dunedin for 40 years, staring there in the 1880s.

But first! Back to1 Peter 2 with the climactic verse 9…

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light. (x2)

Chosen, royal, holy…

**Holy** is one of those words we use a lot in church but do we actually understand it?

*Turn to your neighbour for 2 mins, and tell each other what you think “holy” means…*

- The literal meaning of holy in the languages of the Bible actually means “set apart” or “***different***.” *Did anyone get that?*

- You probably got what being holy means in relation to us though (which is how we usually use the word). For that we start with God… because God is ‘holy,’ God is set apart, God different from us.

God is different because God is **sheer and complete** **goodness and love**. Completely good and completely loving, vitally concerned about how we treat the world and the people around us.

Complete goodness. This is the holy difference of God!

We then are holy, as we set ourselves apart for God, as we live differently for God… seeking to display God’s character in our lives – and this means for us too to be utterly good in everything that we do.

Utter goodness and utterly loving in all areas of our life…

Now of course we are broken people living in a broken world, and so we can’t actually be utterly good in everything that we do. We make mistakes, we need God’s forgiveness, that is just part of life. However, this is still the goal of holiness, this is the road that our holy God calls us down.

And to try to be good in everything that we do, brings us back to the literal meaning of holiness which is to be different. Because, if we are trying to be good in all things, then we will naturally stand out and be different as God is different.

1 Pet 2 again…

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

It isn’t easy being noticeably different in any way though, let alone as believers. Living as a holy nation with our actions setting us apart from others, can be a real struggle.

1) I was really feeling the truth of that while I was watching that TV1 drama about the conscientious objectors in WWI called “Field Punishment 1.”

*Did anyone see that?*

It was pretty hard core, detailing how they were taken to France and basically tortured until they gave in and joined the army. Amber only lasted 20 mins before she had to leave the room.

Regardless if they achieved anything through their pacifist stand, as I watched I was reflecting on *how I thought I’d behave* if I was in that situation – to have a belief that was so out of step with the majority of society, and to suffer so much as a result.

To live differently and to stick to your convictions in *that* situation would have required enormous courage.

2) Another man of courage in the world today forging a different path, I think, is Pope Francis.

His challenge though, is to go against the flow ***within a Christian Church***! A very ancient church with centuries of traditions and normal ways of doing things.

Now every church has its traditions, be they centuries old or just decades old – traditions which might have been really helpful at one point in time, but which might become a hindrance or an idol as situations change. And so churches too need prophetic individuals who will push the boundaries.

Pope Francis is pushing the boundaries by imitating Christ: living simply, showing humility, and speaking up on behalf of the poor and powerless in our world – and though many love him, he is also getting a lot of criticism for it.

Because it is always easier to just do things as they’ve always been done eh? It’s always more convenient to ignore the more challenging teachings of Jesus and to just go with the flow.

To strive to live in a holy way, and to stick at it when it calls us to be dramatically different and to make a fuss, requires huge strength of character, a real trust in God, and a deep passion for the way of Jesus.

**Rutherford Waddell** was a man who I think had this strength and this passion, and he used his pulpit to shape our nation for the better in its early years.

There wasn’t much infrastructure in NZ when he got to Dunedin in the 1880s, and he really threw himself into the bettering of his community.

Dunedin was a Scottish settlement so the Presbyterian churches there were big and he had a lot of helpers – he could not have done what he did without his congregation (which links in with the ‘communal’ rather than individual description of holy difference in 1 Pet 2:9 – people, priesthood, nation… this is a group calling).

And so through his church he set up a bank, a library, educational societies, a gym, he founded the Prison Reform Assn, as well as a cricket and debating club – and as I told the kids earlier, he helped launch NZ’s free kindergarten movement.[[1]](#footnote-2)

I’m not sure where he had the time to do church stuff, but on top of all this he started and ran a national Presbyterian newspaper, and wrote a column for a Dunedin newspaper.

And it was a newspaper that published his sermon titled “**the sin of cheapness**!” A sermon that caused quite a stir, and resulted in many changes to NZ law.

For: In those days in NZ, manufacturing was beginning to take off in the cities, but there was still a lot of unemployment. The manufacturing in Dunedin was based on wool and employed lots of women, a good number of whose husbands had headed off elsewhere in search of a living.

Some husbands found work and sent money home, some didn’t…

Wives were then left to support and feed their families, with the main jobs being in these factories - which paid *very low wages*.

They were doing a hard day’s work from 8am to 11pm, in unhealthy and sometimes dangerous conditions, and only earning 2 shillings a day. This was not enough to adequately feed, clothe and educate their children – leaving lots of bare-foot, undernourished kids spending their days unsupervised and in unsanitary conditions. These were termed ‘starvation wages.’

So! In his sermon “the sin of cheapness” Waddell condemned this situation as sinful! To him, these employers were not acting in ***holiness***!

They were not seeking to be *utterly good* *and loving* in their business practices and their treatment of their fellow citizens – they were preying on and making profits off the weak and the vulnerable.

Once it was picked up by the papers, this sermon provoked outrage against sweatshops in our nation, and public meetings were held!

Only one factory owner came to the meeting Waddell arranged in Dunedin though, a Jewish gentleman called Mr Hallenstein. He publically committed himself that night to not base his business on starvation wages: a move that gained him much goodwill and must’ve worked out ok for him, because his shops are still with us.

As a result of all this commotion the government set up a commission in 1890 to look into the matter, which then proposed legislation that formed the basis of our employment law – things like establishing the Labour Department, workplace safety regulations, a minimum wage, and standard hours of work…

Rev. Waddell went on to do much more, he was involved in many initiatives like the first women’s union, and the Temperance and Suffragette movements - seeing all this public activity as part of being the Church, as part of following Jesus, as part of holy Christian living – ***the call to be utterly good in all of life***.

He had a huge impact on our country.

But, back to the sweatshops… who were these other employers who didn’t come to the public meetings, and who didn’t acknowledge the unholiness of their practices?

They were in fact Presbyterian elders!

They were pillars of the community who donated large sums and helped build the beautiful churches down south. Knox College where I trained to be a minister was built by the richest of these businessmen.

Waddell publically named and shamed those Elders for what they were doing to these women and children, which didn’t impress them, but also didn’t impress some Church leaders either!

And Waddell didn’t only lay blame on the *employers*, he also laid into *consumers*. He claimed that this sin of cheapness existed largely because people desired bargains, uncaring that they “were produced at the cost of the life, prosperity, and happiness of hundreds and thousands of working men and women”[[2]](#footnote-3)

This sounds like a very modern complaint, and it made him a very controversial character.

For Waddell dared to be different. He dared to follow the call of holiness, and to apply the utter goodness and love of God to all of life: including business practices, child care, and shopping in the 1880’s…

Some loved him for it, some hated him.

He changed the law, he improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of Kiwis over history; but he was also criticised and attacked. He was even charged with heresy.

***Because the way of Christ is not always an easy way***. The road of holiness is not always an easy one to walk down.

To be holy means to be different as God is different: to be utterly good in everything that we do. It is a challenge, but as the life of Rutherford Waddell shows, it can also be an exciting adventure, one that brings great blessings to many people….

9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.

How might the life and actions of Rev Waddell speak to us today?

How might we better heed the call to holy living?

1. http://www.teara.govt.nz/en/1966/waddell-rutherford [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. http://www.stlukes.org.nz/?sid=42651 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)