St Peter the Fisherman – Whitianga
Sunday May 7th

Theme: (John 14 - Jesus the way to God)

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I runga i te ingoa o te papa, te tama, me te wairua tapu.

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

*Amen*

 Today brings one of those infrequent opportunities to link the Gospel and the Psalm together. In Psalm 31, David who was frequently in trouble – much of it his own making – sends out a most heartful plea to God.

(text slide)

In you, O Lord, I seek refuge; ….

Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me….

Take me out of the net that is hidden for me,….

Into your hand I commit my spirit; ….

(Text slide pt 1)

In other words – HELP ME, I’M GOING TO BE LOST WITHOUT YOU!

In our reading from John, a piece of text very often used at funerals, Jesus has just told his disciples he will be leaving them, and fairly naturally, they are in a bit of a panic about that.

(Text slide pt 2)

HELP US, WE’RE GOING TO BE LOST WITHOUT YOU.

This is part of a longer segment, on that last night they are all together, where Jesus is telling his disciples what is about to happen, in fairly graphic detail. He had just foretold his betrayal by Judas, and Judas has now slipped out into the night (13:21-30). He has told his disciples that he will be with them only a little while longer, and that where he is going, they cannot come (13:33). He has also foretold Peter’s imminent denial (13:36-38). It is as though the ground is shifting beneath their feet, destabilising the world they had come to know as special travellers alongside Jesus in his ministry.

(where I am going …)

The bit they all remember of course, is where he says “where I am going you cannot come”. What? After three years of following Jesus all around Galilee he’s going to dump them? They all had the same selective hearing we carry – registering the bit that has the most impact on each of them personally. Especially Peter, who zoned out the bit about “before the cock crows, you will have denied me three times”.

For those of us who sneak off to the Jones Channel and amongst a raft of other nostalgic searches, relive the many special moments from ‘Dad’s Army’; this is a Corporal Jones’ moment – “Don’t panic Mr Mannering!”

Jesus responds to the anxiety of his disciples by saying, “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me” (14:1). Jesus calls them back to this fundamental relationship of trust and assures them that he is not abandoning them. It is a promise, a word of comfort to his disciples. Jesus himself is all they need; there is no need to panic, no need to search desperately for a secret map.

(In my Father’s house)

In my Father’s house there are many dwelling places. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you?

He then continues with what I personally find to be almost the most comforting words in the whole of the Bible – (debates on everyone else’s personal preferences can take place over morning tea. Most of them are on the walls of our new Entry Way).

With all his doubts and challenges, when the chips were down, David said, felt and believed, the right words – in a slightly different translation of words in verse one of Psalm 31. In you O Lord, I put my trust. Contained very well in a Doxology, sung quite regularly by us at Holy Communion.

 It begins with two statements of comfort from God, then continues with David’s acknowledgement and statement of trust.

(Video Be still and know that I am God)

We sing it. Do we believe it? Really trusting in Jesus (and thus in God) was, in spite of their close association and involvement in his works, was still a struggle for the disciples, and may well be for some of us.

Thomas, for instance, like most characters in the Gospel, takes Jesus quite literally.

(GPS)

He wants the actual directions, a road map to this place (14:5). A first edition of a GPS.

(I am the way)

Patiently, Jesus responds by saying that he himself is the way, the spiritual GPS: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life. ….

(If you know me …)

If you know me, you will know my Father also”. In other words, it will be your level of faith in me that shows you the way to come to me and thus to God.

Nah! That still didn’t work for Philip. “Look, Jesus, just show us God and we’ll be satisfied, and be OK about you leaving us”. No wonder Jesus sounds a bit exasperated. Spoiler alert!

(Image of God)

No-one has ever seen God, and that isn’t about to happen now. Jesus is the closest manifestation to God that will ever be, and we are just hugely fortunate that God loved us enough to send him, to be God’s presence to all who believe.

At the very least Philip, and the rest of humanity, can we all just accept and believe that God was totally present in Jesus, demonstrated by the miracles that Jesus performed – in front of plenty of witnesses. If we do, then Jesus will take us to himself, and we too will dwell in the house of God.

This text is not only about life after death 2,000 years ago, but is a text that has everything to do with our lives here and now. As Jesus had only shortly before said to Thomas, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe.” This is not so much a scolding for Thomas, as a blessing for us who have not seen and yet believe, however feeble our believing may seem to us at times.

(Jesus with the Holy Spirit)

Jesus promises to be with us through the power of the Spirit, to work in and through us to accomplish his purposes in the world. This does not necessarily happen in easily visible, spectacular ways, as was the case when he was on earth, and moving around Galilee with his first disciples. Yet wherever there is healing, reconciling, life-giving or saving work happening, this is the work of God. Wherever there is life in abundance, this is Jesus’ presence in our midst.

Amen