

**“Is the Lord among us or not?”**

In 1984 Janet and I came to Auckland so I could attend Zion Bible Training Centre, which was a Bible School run by the Queen Street AOG. I was 24 and Janet 22, I had been a Gardeners Labourer and Janet an administrative clerk. We had lived in Ruakaka for many years, if you have ever been there, you know it's not big, we came to Auckland with two small children and no money. We had a place to live in Blockhouse Bay while it was being sold, we came because I felt a call to ministry. It was a huge shift in so many ways for us as a couple and as a family.

The pressure in those early days was intense, money pressure because there wasn't any, work pressure with study and learning and going to college, and simple being so far out of your comfort zone you couldn't see land in any direction pressure. It was very, very hard.

I remember a Sunday night at Royal Oak Baptist and feeling as low as a badger's burrow, wondering what on earth we were doing in Auckland. This place wasn't home, it wasn't Ruakaka, it wasn't where our friends and family were, it wasn't the stable unexciting and unambitious life we had had, it wasn't where our church was, it wasn't Northland where most of my life had been spent. This was someplace else.

When I went in to church, they were singing. Some of you will remember Scripture in Song from those days, and “Lift high the banners of live, hallelujah ...” they were singing that. As I came in, it was the third verse “Brothers (please excuse the gender biased language) Brothers are you sure of your calling,” it goes on ... “will you fight for Jesus the King, are you prepared in this battle, to lay down your lives for your friends.”

Brother was I sure of my calling, would I fight for Jesus the King, was I prepared for this battle I was in, was I prepared to pay the price God had called me to?

**“Is the Lord among us or not?”**

Here I was in 1984 standing squarely in the place of Israel in the wilderness. Complaining about where God had led us, about what God had called us too. Worrying, murmuring.

In our reading from Exodus last week it was about food, meat and bread. This week it's about water. Last week it was “You have brought us out of Egypt to kill us with hunger.” This week it is “Why did you bring us out of Egypt to kill us, our children and our livestock with thirst?”

For me it was “Why did you bring us to Auckland to destroy us, this is hard.”

**“Is the Lord among us or not?”**

In our Matthean reading the chief priests and elders of Israel question Jesus, “By whose authority do you do these things?” Who said you can do this? In effect, they question Jesus call. Jesus then asks them the same question about John, who called John, he asks. They know the answer, but lie, so Jesus tells them a parable about truth and lies, about thinking you are right and actually being right.

You are right the parable says, when you do what God calls you to do.

**“Is the Lord among us or not?”**

In the reading from Philipians, Paul suggests to us what God wants. Paul opens the pages on our calling. Paul shows us what God calls us to do.

**“Is the Lord among us or not?”**

As we look around, as we read the newspapers, watch the TV news, maybe see Facebook or other online media sources, when we view the situation around the world, everything seems to be crumbling. Fires and floods and typhoons and hurricanes, and then the virus, it seems to be coming back everywhere. Things look decidedly grim.

Then we have our own worries and concerns which aren't related to these events, health and families, relationships and personal issues. You may be feeling as low as a badger's burrow as well from time to time. You may be saying to the Lord, “Why did you bring us to this place to kill us, destroy us, this is hard.”

You may be feeling that the life you have been called too, is under attack. You may be asking the question **“Is the Lord among us or not?”**

In Exodus the Lord was among the people in the deliverance from Egypt, signs and wonders in the wilderness, water from the rock. In Matthew the Lord was among the people in the sign of Jesus the Messiah son of the living God.

In Philippians the Lord is among the people in the love and consolation, sympathy and compassion, joy and humility of Jesus.

For us, The Lord is among us in our journeying out of Egypt, our way through the wilderness. In our experiences of the Holy Spirit, our gathering in this place, our experience of Jesus in eucharist, the words we have heard and touched, the love and compassion, sympathy and unity we have felt and shared, the humility we have seen with our own eyes: that Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, and being found in human form, humbled himself ...

**“Is the Lord among us or not?”**

The answer in these testing times, for the world as it is now, for ourselves as we are now, for our calling to the Christian way of living as it is now ...

Is the Lord among us or not ... yes.

Always.

May the God of all hope, encourage, strengthen and empower you in all you face today and in the weeks to come, and the blessing of God Almighty, Father, Son and Holy Spirit be upon you now and always ...

Thanks be to God.