

**‘Be Curious’ a sermon given at Service of Worship led by
Bruce Howat, at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand. Sunday 29
September, Pentecost 19**

“May my words and my thoughts be acceptable to you, O Lord, my refuge and my redeemer!” Psalm 19:14

Today I want to talk with you about the concept of “be curious.” When we are young, being curious is natural, it is how we learn as young ones, making mistakes is the best way to learn. Somehow, as we progress through the education system, we attempt to kill the curiosity factor in favour of the security of listening to the knowledge of those with more knowledge than us. Then if you happen to go to university, once you get to post-graduate level you are supposed to be curious again and challenge the thinking of those you learnt from.

The word curious comes from the Latin adjective curious meaning “careful” or “inquisitive” The word has been used to describe things that are subtle, sophisticated or require care or art. The word has also been used to describe a desire to see or learn what is strange or unknown. This is why from faith perspective it is a powerful word, and we welcome those who are curious, as you are wrestling with profound matters that we might never understand or know. The God we worship is far too great for us to truly know, hence there is an element of mystery about our faith.

This concept applies to the emergency services. When you start, there is a huge degree of curiosity, then you learn all the technical skills to do the basics of the job, then after finishing basic training you get exposed to the reality of your work, and curiosity might save your own life, or someone else. It will also help with the quality of your decision making, because what makes the emergency services different to the rest of us, you save lives, you protect our community, at times in very dangerous, unpleasant circumstances. Hence, in the tamariki section of the service we asked questions along those lines, to give authenticity to my sermon.

The concept of curiosity is the same as lifelong learning. When you think you know it all, you are a liability to yourself, your colleagues, and the public. Many sleeps ago, I had the privilege of training Paramedics in leadership at an institution in West Auckland. I got the role because of my own time in the blue. One of the groups I took, I had two completely different paramedics attending. One was Patsy, stationed near Kumeu, the other was Peter from Penrose. All Patsy wanted to do was serve her community, faithfully, caring, nurturing many generations, which she did until she retired. Peter was the opposite. I have never heard anyone articulate their future more clearly than Peter. He was planning to go to London and be their CEO, then he would come back to New Zealand as CEO of what we now know as Hato Hone St John, all of which he did and is still doing. Both paramedics wear the same uniform, both committed to lifelong learning and both very successful.

What relevance does this have for us today. Firstly, we wanted you here so we could say a genuine thank you, all of you, for how you get out of bed each day, and make the rest of us feel safe. There is also more to today than just saying thanks, we want to understand you, so that as a Church community we can pray for you daily, wrapping our korowai of safety, healing, wellbeing and wisdom around you, a korowai that we believe can only be as holistic as it is, if it is given by God.

So now comes the God talk bit of it all. The Bible says we are all made in the image of God, and with over eight billion people in the world, this demonstrates part of the image of God. We also believe that God created the universe and beyond. It is the beyond bit, that is more than a stretch for the human mind. And we need to feel comfortable that we cannot know, explain everything. We do not need to justify God, because God is bigger than we can comprehend. There are some traps for us, as human language(s) are our own constructs to explain what is going on around us. Language is not perfect, the closest thing we have is music, because it can take us places that language cannot address.

I want to quote Professor Lera Boroditsky from University of California – San Diego, cognitive scientist who is doing leading edge work proving language shapes our reality. “Languages have all kinds of structural quirks. This is one of my favourites. Lots of languages have grammatical gender, every noun gets assigned a gender, often masculine or feminine. And these genders differ across

languages. So, for example, the sun is feminine in German, but masculine in Spanish, and the moon, the reverse.”

This has huge implications for those of us who study the Bible. Ever since I was a very young person, God having a gender was illogical to me then and still is today. It is a human construct because our grasp of infinity is non-existent. What reality is our language making. Well thought through words can calm a situation, give us a fresh perspective, and if we adhere to the biblical concept of wisdom, it can only come from the Holy One. In other words, we pray for guidance and wisdom, and that might only take less than a second. In my life I spent more time in prayer when I was in the Police, than I have in any other role. I am not claiming wisdom, just knowledge that the Holy One never left me – I was a dog handler, and wisdom was not something we were gifted with.

Our reading from Esther is a satire of bureaucracy. Between Harman and the King, there is a plot to exterminate the Jews. History has proven many groups have tried to rid themselves of the Jews, none have succeeded. One of my many learnings this year is that Martin Luther, the one who nailed his thesis on the Church door at Wittenberg, that eventually led to the Catholic/Protestant split. Martin Luther wanted the Jews exterminated because they put Christ on the cross. The Nazi's captured his works and words, to justify their own hatred of Jews. We all know the outcome of that.

But let's go back to Esther, a Jewish orphan, the least powerful members, from the least powerful gender, of a powerless people (Jews) in the mighty Persian Empire. She became the Saviour of her people by mastering her fears. Take time to read the Book of Esther, it is a fascinating reading.

Our reading from James, which we believe was written by James, half-brother of Jesus, explains to us that getting work done and being a busy bee for Jesus, is not the big picture of a relationship with God, through Jesus Christ. Being in the emergency services requires an above average level of fitness. When we lift someone, we lift from our core, otherwise we end up with significant back injuries plus. This same principle applies to having faith in God. Are we a friend of the world, or a friend of God. This is the message in our reading from James.

If we are lifelong learners, not just in our jobs, but in the nurturing of our faith, we can get to the state that others call us wise. But as James describes it, wisdom from above is pure. Equally, wisdom from above is gentle. Actions and choices prompted by God, through you, make for peace, beauty, joy, and abundance. So, if anyone tells you being a Christian is easy, they have missed understanding what we are actually about. A famous theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, wrote a brilliant book, the Cost of Discipleship. He talks about cheap grace (love of God) and costly grace, which is the basic tenant for being a Christian. It is not about having an insurance policy to make sure your life is trouble free. It is about having someone with you through tough times.

So, when you attend a tough incident, be curious, and remember there are a lot of us praying for you, respecting the work you do, and do not be scared to silently pray a genuine prayer to God for guidance to deliver a wise outcome.

We give thanks to God for your role in protecting, caring, and having the communities back. Amen.

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KNOX CHURCH, DUNEDIN

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have a transformative effect on people's lives and on the
world in which we live.***



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