

**“Prompting” a sermon based on John 6:35, 41-51 preached by Kerry Enright at Knox Church Dunedin New Zealand on Sunday 12 August 2018.**

Over recent weeks, people have spoken with me about a gentle prompting in their lives, a sense that they being drawn to something more, something deeper, more spacious, more enduring. Not because there was anything drastically wrong with their lives. Just because they sensed something more.

A prompting of their spirit.

For some it is happening to them as a family, as they review their life together, what they are doing with their days, their work and study and service. For some more personal.

It is easy to miss such prompting amid the noise and activity of our lives. It is easy to put it aside as inconvenient or because there is not space in our lives for any change. It is easy to keep living the way we already live, avoiding disruption.

But such prompting does not go away, whether it be loud and insistent, or heard only in stillness. The prompting has been planted in our lives to enable us to grow as human beings, to open us out, to deepen our joy, to extend our love. That prompting is constant, and sometimes the conditions are right for us to hear it.

People have spoken of that prompting in many ways.

Some people learned to listen for the prompting from their families, in lives of daily prayer and reading the Bible and noticing nature and valuing interactions.

I was not one of those, although from an early age there was an attraction to wonder, to reflecting on my puniness in the face of the immensity of space, to the wonder of our humanity placed on this tiny planet.

And then at University, living in close quarters with young Christian people who had a sense of purpose I did not have, something to live for.

They reminded me of a prompting within, they nourished it to become a hunger, so I eventually responded to it and sought to follow Christ.

It was a time of transition for me, from home, from the familiar, to University, to new ideas and new patterns of living and ways of understanding.

Transitions are times to listen to prompting.

The ways people experience prompting is as diverse as people.

Simone Weil, a brilliant twentieth century French thinker. Simone acknowledged the prompting but she thought the only way to live was, as she put it, “to adopt the best attitude with regard to the problems of this world, and that such an attitude did not depend upon the solution to the problem of God.”

Weil lived this way, within a Christian framework, with a Christian ethic, not feeling the need for anything more. She lived trying to do the right thing, feeling deeply the challenges of the time in Europe. Her physical health failed and she went through what she called a period of wretchedness. Here is one of the many promptings she experienced.

“I entered the little Portuguese village, which, alas, was very wretched too, on the very day of its patronal festival. I was alone. It was the evening and there was a full moon. It was by the sea. The wives of the fishermen were going in procession to making a tour of all the ships, carrying candles and singing what must certainly be very ancient hymns of heart-wrenching sadness. Nothing can give any idea of it.... There the conviction was suddenly borne in upon me that Christianity is pre-eminently the religion of slaves, that slaves cannot help belonging to it, and I among others.”

John says we are drawn to God by God.

For CS Lewis, there was no drama.

“I know very well when, but hardly how, the final step was taken. I was driven to Whipsnade one sunny morning. When we set out I did not believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God, and when we reached the zoo I did. Yet I had not exactly spent the journey in thought. Nor in great emotion ... It was more like when a man, after long sleep, still lying motionless in bed, becomes aware that he is now awake ...”

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For Malcolm Muggeridge the prompting came through the hollowness of grand aspirations contrasting with the light of ordinary people. He tells of walking the streets of Moscow and Manhattan, unimpressed by the attempts of Communists and Capitalists alike at building heavenly kingdoms on earth. It

was padding the streets of Moscow and New York, he said, that his belief in great kingdoms dissolved. Of Christ he wrote ...

“And You? I never caught even a glimpse of You in any paradise – unless You were an old shoeshine man on a windy corner in Chicago one February morning, smiling ear to ear; or a little man with a lame leg in the Immigration Department in New York, whose smiling patience as he listened to one Puerto Rican after another seemed to reach from there to eternity. Or again at Kiev, at an Easter service, when the collectivisation famine was in full swing and the congregation was packed into an Orthodox church, all luminous, all singing.”

John says we are drawn to God by God, by the Spirit of God at work in our lives.

A magnetic impulse attracting us towards the source of life.

A hunger driving us towards the bread of life.

An impulse as varied as are we.

One of those who knew that impulse was our dearly loved Iris Woods who died last Sunday night, a member of this congregation for 26 years. The voice was an insistent one for Iris, a call, so even though she was too young to be eligible, she applied to become a deaconess, a role to which women in the church were called and trained and ordained. She pressed on until she was accepted. And then when it was decided that women in this church could be ordained to the ministry of word and sacrament, Iris was among the first. She served near Nelson, in Central Otago and near Christchurch. She spoke of how hard it was for women in ministry, of the man who saw her standing outside the church welcoming people in, and when realising she would be leading the service he turned away. And in this congregation, she served in many ways, she led prayers, she encouraged many, a warm, welcoming, kind person. We give thanks for the life and ministry of Iris Woods, who responded to the prompting of God in her life. We give thanks for her part in this community of faith.

I have told stories of people for whom a prompting came, an impulse, a word.

For each of them, life came in responding to that prompting, and allowing it to expand in them, until the prompting became the determiner of their life, the giver of their direction, a hunger for the bread of life.

I pray for you who are becoming aware of that prompting, that you will listen to it, allow it space, and that it might become for you a hunger for the bread of life, even Jesus Christ.

For it is God at work in you.



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