

So you might have noticed that each Lenten season we have the hymn 'Love will be our Lenten Calling'. We have had it at some point in the liturgy each week of lent for the last three years. Today, at this mid point in our Lenten journey for 2019, I thought I would share with you, a personal reflection, not only on this hymn, but my connection to it. Why it is so powerful and necessary in my Lenten journey. And why I would like you to understand not only my journey but perhaps reflect on your own journey a little, in the process.

*Display text to love will be our Lenten calling*

Have a look at the text for this hymn. Are you able to read the words, without singing them? Can you read them without even humming the tune? This hymn has become so much a part of my Lenten disciplines and journey over the years, that even if I weren't to have it included regularly, still it would resonate and instigate memory and emotion, and i would still sing it.

When something touches us deeply, it becomes a part of us. For me, music and song has a way of doing this, of initiating deep memory which is more than simple recall, more even, than just historical remembering, or muscle memory. This kind of remembering, has a physical and emotional aspect, as well as a spiritual one.

For the six weeks of lent as well as over some of the Easter liturgies, 'Love will be our Lenten Calling; is played for some, as often as 1/2 doz a times, for others we will sing it or hear it, over 2 dozen times, maybe even more.

I am trying to manipulate you in some way with this hymn? Am I trying to engage you with the Lenten liturgies though the words and tune of this hymn? Well, yes! I'm trying to encourage you to engage with God, on a level or plain which I understand and think you'll also understand? By exposing you to this hymn over and over, week after week, year after year, not only am I saying something about what I believe, but, it could be said, that I am trying to influence you in a way that perhaps you would not have chosen for yourself.

And this at its most basic, could be called manipulation. But then again, we could look at it more subjectively and say, 'this is why you pay me in the first place. Am I not supposed to influence you for God?' In the core of my beliefs and calling from God, I believe this is what I am supposed to do.

Let me ask you this question? Does God sit in the foreground of your thinking, like singing the hymn each week, in the foreground of your interaction with the world, or, does God sit in the background, like just moving through life, but not really engaging with God's call, like a melody that sits behind the words of song. Does this God in the background undergird your existence in the world? I'm hoping its a bit of a both/and scenario? That God is both Fore and Back.

So why this hymn? Well apart from the obvious, that its one of my favourites, which the choir will tell you is almost all the hymns I sing, 'Love will be our Lenten Calling' is also theologically congruent with who we are as Anglicans in the diocese of Brisbane in the 21st century and, it carries a central theme most of us can engage with; not the least of which is love.

I mean we all know love in some form or another, whether its been or is edifying or destructive. But God's love is the penultimate expression of all love. Its like, or it should be like the ear worm of a song, that you cant get out of your mind, always keeping God's love in the foreground as well as background of our journey to the cross in Lent. By playing this song each week, I am trying to keep Jesus' journey to the cross, in perspective with our 21st century lives, reminding us, that even though we are on our way to the cross, we are still post Easter, post resurrection people and I believe, that our calling from God is always first and foremost to love. By playing, and singing the hymn every week, we keep God in the foreground, as well as the background; and we keep Love central.

The gospel speaks in triangles of love, triads of calling, of lament and of being. 'Love will be our Lenten calling;', speaks in triads of loving, living and learning. God is our ultimate triad, our Trinity of love peace and truth. 'Love will be our Lenten calling' asks us to be more, trust more, engage more.

Loving, living and learning is what God gives us, shows us, responds to us with, and love is what God calls us to, as well as what undergirds or underpins, that very relationship with God. Essentially that's what Jesus is saying today in the gospel reading. Perhaps not always in a way we can understand, but definitely in a way that we can feel, integrate and remember. God's love is like the ear worm of a tune, sitting in the background of our memories, playing and enticing us forward into a deeper and more connected relationship with Jesus.

Love, Christ, will be and is, our Lenten calling, living and learning.

I have at different times, reflected on how God is my love, and how that love calls me. I have remembered how, even in times of conflict and great sadness, God was and is, my deep abiding peace; my shalom, and, I have learned that God continues to be my truth; my gauge over right and wrong.

When I was young, I struggled to understand how something could be right with the world but wrong with God, or vice versa. Over the years I have struggled with right and wrong, especially with regards to my own particular journey, not only through the process of becoming a priest, but even through the process of living. I have worried about the way I do things, the way I think about things, the way I engage with God and God's people. I am always concerned with, how I come to the decisions I come to. How I think about and reconcile my inner core beliefs, with the world stuff that bothers me or scares

me. Surprisingly, I have come to the conclusion that Jesus is right. When scripture says you cannot add a single hour to your life with worrying, I actually do know this. I know it to be true, that worrying gets me nowhere. But, still it is hard, if not impossible. Have you ever told a worrier not to worry, even if that worrier is you?

So rather than the worry about that, which I cannot change, ie, the past or my personal history, it occurred to me that 'love is' actually my reason for existence, my calling and the reason the song resonates so deeply. I have reflected on what else is at play in my experience of needing to be accepted, believed and loved.

I think that for most of my life I have been a people pleaser. I would say and do stuff, to please whoever I was with at the time, mostly my mother. I had a knack of knowing what would make another happy. So I grew up being the good girl, who always did as she was told. But, I was deeply unhappy. At one point I realised that life was always going to be about someone else's happiness instead of my own, whilst at the same time, knowing in the centre of my being, that this is not what God wants for me. Even at age 12, my people pleasing had become so ingrained in me, that even at that fateful time, when regular, systematic abuse was a normal everyday occurrence, I was trying to please everyone but myself. I would do what I was told, because somewhere in my psyche, I needed to be loved and needed to be needed.

The thought that I wouldn't be wanted was too hard to think about, let alone, imagine. I had convinced myself, that the life that was before me, was the only one available to me, that this was the only way I could be loved. But, I also knew in the core of my being, that God loved me differently to everyone else. That God never expected me, or required me to always be the good girl, especially at my own expense. God didn't require me to continue hurting myself to please anyone. I learned that this was not, and is not love. Even in the midst of hatred, violence and abhorrent behaviour, I always knew God loved me. That, more than any other thing, is why I am still here.

I will admit, that sometimes, it was all too hard, sometimes I had no choice, but to hide under the wings of God, like the baby chicks do, not even wanting to peep out and see what's coming, but then other times, knowing that God would protect me, gave me the courage to venture out away from his protective warmth and see if I could manage on my own. Love has been and will continue to be my saviour, my companion, my hand out of the pit. My band aid to cover open wounds, my stitches and pulling together of ragged skin. Love has been my chemo to life's cancer, my healing and my reason for being. Love is and has always been my calling. Even though I can't really define what this is, or was, or could be, I still know that it is true.

So 'Love will be my Lenten Calling' is not simply a nice song that I like and am inflicting on you because I like it. It's not even just a nice set of theological

phrases, put together to create a nice story or sermon. It is a real action, begun by God, realised in me, and lived through this community of which I am a part. I am so very blessed to be a part of this Wynnum community, and I have grown as a person and as a priest, knowing that God's acceptance and love is reciprocated here, without my need to please, and sometimes even in spite of it. I have learnt that by being true to my calling and Gods plan for me, I am living into that calling.

So, as this Lenten journey continues to move us and call us forward out of our comfort zones, out of our complacency, and into love, peace and truth, what will be your Lenten calling? I hope it will be love.

Amen.