

Sermon for August 5th, All Saints Anglican Church, Howick.

Ephesians 4: 1- 16 John 6: 24 – 35

The Reverend Jemma Allen

The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand has a promotion around 'Five Ways to Wellbeing'. As a counsellor I spend a lot of time working with people to develop and strengthen their wellbeing. And when I saw the five ways I thought about how many of them are present in our life together at All Saints.

The first way is **connect – me whakawhanaunga.**

Humans need to feel close to other people and valued by them. Relationships and social connection are really important for mental wellbeing. At All Saints we are a community of more than one generation, of different cultures and life experiences. There are opportunities to be connected. But it is also easy to slip in and out of your spot in the church without getting to know anyone. And that might be important in some seasons – to be able to check out whether this is a place you can belong, but when we let people sit in our pews and feel lonely we are not only diminishing wellbeing, we are also failing to be who we claim to be as follower of Jesus.

In the letter to Ephesians we hear, I therefore, the prisoner in the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, making every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

To bear with one another in love, you have to know each other, be in relationship with each other. I would say you have to be close enough to each other to irritate one another from time to time – otherwise we wouldn't need patience and to make an effort to stay together. Who do you know in the congregation who is different to you? Different age,

different life experience, maybe even different theology? Who likes a different style of music to you? Who might you be being invited to get to know better?

Connecting is important to our wellbeing, but it is also important to living out our faith. And staying connected to God is of course important too.

The second way to wellbeing is **to give, tukua**.

Giving is more than just the sharing of material things with others. It is about cultivating a spirit of generosity, that same generosity we heard about in the reading from Ephesians. One of the things we have worked very hard on as a community in the last four years is making sure that people of all ages have an opportunity to give of their time, talents and treasures, serving God in this place. This place would not exist without the generous giving of many people's financial gifts both in the legacy of the buildings we have inherited but also in the weekly offerings that keep staff on the payroll, the lights on and allows for money for all the things we need for our life together. You all also know how important I believe it is that we receive the many gifts our children have to offer our life as a worshipping and serving community. I hope you will continue to value the gifts that each one brings to your shared life.

The third way to wellbeing is to **take notice, me aro tonu**.

We often talk about counting our blessings. This act of noticing the good, noticing the graces we receive, noticing the beauty we see about us not only contributes to our wellbeing but connects us to the giver of every good gift, our good and gracious God.

I have already talked about the beauty that is ours because of previous generations of this community. We also have beautiful flowers because of the flower roster people, beautiful grounds because of the work of the Tuesday gang, the lawn mowers and the garden planners. A daily

practice of taking notice, of giving thanks is good for the wellbeing of our minds and our spirits.

The fourth way to wellbeing is **be active, me kori tonu.**

In the letter to the Ephesians this morning we heard the gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ.

God has given you a gift – that is what God is like. And God doesn't just give gifts and leave us to it, God gives us gifts and by the power of the Holy Spirit gives us what we need to express that gift for the building up of the body of Christ. Your gift might be to prophesy or it might be evangelism or teaching. Some of us are called to be pastors. Some of us are given the gift of faith, to believe with and for a community. Others of us are people of prayer, or have the gift of encouragement. Or the gift of making preserves to fund pyjamas for children who are cold. Some of us bring the gift of humour, the gift of enthusiasm, the gift of singing. If you think we will be who we are called to be as the Body of Christ without your gift, you are wrong. We need each other. We need the babies to bring us delight and teach us patience when they are screaming. We need the 90-somethings with their long view and their store of wisdom and experience. We need everyone.

Which brings me to the fifth way to wellbeing. **Keep learning, me ako tonu.**

The Mental Health Foundation provides this summary: “Embrace new experiences, see opportunities, surprise yourself”. That is at the heart of what it is to be part of the church. We need to embrace new experiences as we learn from one another and move into the future. We need to see opportunities if we are to serve our neighbours well.

And surprise yourself! Who knows what God might be inviting you to do, to learn, to try.

The summary in the passage from Ephesians this morning is my sincere prayer for you all: *we must grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and knitted together by every ligament with which it is equipped, as each part is working properly, promotes the body's growth in building itself up in love.*

As I leave from this place I delight in the gifts and goodness of this community. I pray that you will continue to grow, that you will be built up in love – by your love for one another and by the love of God, our God who is above all and through all and in all.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.