

**SUMMARY OF TALK GIVEN AT FOOTSCRAY BAPTIST CHURCH  
on Sunday 30<sup>th</sup> November 2025  
by Sr. Miriam, Community of the Transfiguration**

FIRST SUNDAY IN ADVENT

**Reading: Isaiah 2:1-4**

*In days to come, the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established as the highest of the mountains,  
and shall be raised above the hills; all the nations shall stream to it.  
Many peoples shall come and say,  
'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his  
ways  
and that we may walk in his paths.'  
For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He shall judge  
between the nations, and shall arbitrate for many peoples;  
they shall beat their swords into ploughshares,  
and their spears into pruning hooks;  
nation shall not lift up sword against nations,  
neither shall they learn war any more.'*

The prophet Isaiah spoke these words at some time between 742 and 701 B.C. – let's say about 2750 years ago. It was a dark time in Israel's history. The Assyrians invaded the region and devastated everything. In 722 B.C. Samaria was destroyed, the population was deported and foreigners were settled in the Northern part of Israel. Judah lost its independence and was incorporated in the Assyrian empire as a vassal, meaning crushing taxes. It was certainly NOT a time when nations beat their swords into ploughshares.

Isaiah had a vision of God in 742 B.C. (see Isaiah chapter 6), and when God asked, 'Whom shall I send?' he said, 'Here I am, send me'. The Lord then sent him to Israel to be God's prophet and messenger – but God warned him: 'They will not listen! They are deaf and blind and wilfully closed against Me.' Isaiah was distressed: 'But for how long?' God said: until the land is deserted, the cities burnt down, the forest cut down so that only the tree stumps remain.'

A terrible prospect.

But there was also hope: there will be a remnant who will return to God; the tree stump contains a shoot – 'a holy seed is its stump'.

For 40 years Isaiah proclaimed the word of God – and none of the hope came to pass in his lifetime. What was he to do? Give up and despair? Turn his back on God and on the people who ignored him? Forget about the whole thing and just get on with life?

Isaiah had to make a decision – just as we have to, not only here in Footscray but in lots of places where there is little left of the church we used to know: only a few people of faith here and there in a time of global uncertainty and new wars. What will you and I do? Give up? Lose faith? Do nothing?

Isaiah made his decision.

1. He decided to write down the words God had given him, and to entrust them to his disciples for a future time (Isaiah 8:16). And if he had not done this, we would not be hearing his words of hope today, 2750 years later, when they give us strength to keep going in our time.

2. He decided to put his trust in God (Isaiah 8:16). No one knew what the future held. No one had any control. In the face of anxiety, fear for survival, and despair over the state of the world, Isaiah put his trust in God.

3. He made the decision that, no matter how bad or hopeless things were, he and his family would be signs of hope and witnesses of a future yet to come. He would remain faithful. He named one of his children 'Shear-jashub', which means 'A remnant shall return'. And another child he called 'Immanuel', which means 'God is with us'. The children would remind the people each day that God is with us, for God 'never abandons the work of His own hands', and that there will be a remnant, a shoot from which new life will come

So here you are at Footscray. There are only a few of you. Is God with you – even though you are only a few? Is there a future even though you cannot predict or control it? Will there be faith in the generations to come? Can you trust God for this?

You need to decide – and that will have very practical implications.

The Community Ron and I belong to, began about 54 years ago, in a tiny congregation in Breakwater, Geelong. There were only six ageing people there – and the church was about to close down. Then six younger people came who had a vocation to live together as a monastic contemplative community, with life commitments and holding all their possessions in common. The 'remnant' at Breakwater offered to the fledgling Community a home and a church and a place where they could grow. Did they know what would happen? No. Could anyone have predicted it? No. For fifteen years the tiny congregation and the fledgling monastic community lived together. The original congregation died, the community grew and is now the Baptist Monastery of the B.U.V. in Teesdale, which has touched the lives of thousands of people in the last few decades. No one could have predicted it. But one thing is clear: it would not have happened without the faith, trust, love and hospitality of the few members of the original Baptist church at Breakwater.

So, what will happen here at Footscray? You cannot know. Of course, there is nothing wrong with dying: things come to an end. There is always change – it cannot be avoided. That is what it means to be mortal.

But what you can do is make decisions that will benefit the future, that will be a legacy, a starting point, 'good soil' for something else to grow – if not in our lifetime, then in the generations to come.

## **HOW DO WE GO ABOUT MAKING SUCH DECISIONS? HOW DO WE DISCERN?**

Here are a few things I have learnt over 45 years of parish ministry and 30 years in Community.

Let us not be seduced by the mentality and the values of the culture we live in.

- The culture says: bigger is better. We say: small is beautiful. Small is relational. Small means we know each other and can bear each others' burdens. The Community Ron and I belong to is intentionally small.
- The culture says: you have to be successful or you are nothing. We say, what matters is not whether we are successful but whether we are faithful: to God, to each other, to the great commandment to love each other, our neighbours and our enemies, as God in Christ has loved us.
- The culture says: it's necessary and important to be transactional, commercially sensible, and self-serving.

We say: God's ways are not our ways. Relationships are more important than profit. We are called to serve others, not exploit them: for their benefit, not for our advantage and convenience..

- The culture says: play it safe, be in control.

We say: take a risk; trust God and each other.

- The culture says, there is nothing you can do. You are going to die – and that makes everything meaningless.

We say: death for us is a beginning. It's perfectly okay to die – because new life will come. But it's NOT okay to stop trying.

We have a Resolve that expresses the way we try live in our Community.

'Be the good of love, for God, for neighbour, for all creation.'

When we have to make risky decisions, we ask ourselves:

- Are we motivated by fear or by love? (*Love casts out fear!*)
- Does our decision serve ourselves or others?
- Are we honest with each other about how we are actually feeling about this?
- We try to remember that we are part of a BIG STORY, a BIG PICTURE far beyond our own little circle, far beyond our imagining, and far beyond space and time. We play a part in it.
- And again: it's not about succeeding – it's about trying.

Our Resolve concludes with these words:

'For us there is only the trying,  
the rest is none of our business.'

Blessing to you, dear friends. We will remember you in our prayers as you discern the way forward.

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