

Override

Jeremiah 1:4-10; Luke 13:10-17

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It seems I've become a bit of a chaplain guru. Even though I've left chaplaincy, I am still filled with wonder and because of that, I keep talking about it. That has given me a 'profile'. I'd like to think it was my expertise but it more likely to have been my longevity that got me into this position. People know my face¹. For outsiders, anyone who survives 10 years in chaplaincy is a wonder. For those of us who have been chaplains, it really is about 10 years of thriving. No other ministry tests and enhances your faith as much as chaplaincy.

Yet when I am talking to trainees, it is hard to find the words to tell them how much training, how much skill and education they will have to get their heads around and at the same time, how much they will need to trust in God because none of us knows what we are doing. It is God's work. We learn techniques but God speaks.

Every chaplain begins like Philip on the South Road – with no idea what they are supposed to do. They know God has told them to be there – and so they show up.

I would say almost every Deacon called into ordination has come from the same place as Joshua. We are not 'normal' – we don't start from a place that looks or feels like 'Minister'. There is no inner voice that says "pick me! Pick me!" We are ordinary folk who have heard a call and spend, sometimes, years looking over our shoulder to see if God is speaking to someone else – someone more 'priestly'.

Finally, the voice is so loud, we have to show up and confess "I do not know how to speak..." and the lord reaches out and touches our mouths and then, when we are standing alone in a room with someone in crisis, terrified, the words will come to us – we will hear what they need and we can truly be there because God always was.

The call to Ministry, and in particularly the Diaconate, usually starts with someone recognising in someone else something they didn't even know was there. Every person I have talked to told me about one person who saw the

¹ Or possibly my loud mouth

spirit and encouraged, fed, cajoled and mentored them into a pastoral role that lit up their lives and was truly water to their thirst.

This is something different from what we knew as evangelism. We weren't sold Jesus, or scripture – instead we were recognised, seen, and through love in action fell deeply in faith. That is a totally different experience from the historical church-focussed evangelism practiced in the last century. Meeting people where they are and seeing the flame within them is different from assuming you know the way, the only way, and tell others to follow. Where is God in that? A chaplain lights the path before them for those who are on their own journey. God will lead the way.

And that's what chaplains do. They see. And in doing so, they change lives, even if it is just for a minute or a few days.

Here I'll hit you with some research statistics.² When they broke down what actually worked in grief counselling, they found that 70% of the improvement was due to a person being able to tell their story to an empathic/reflective listener. 15% was attributed to the chaplain/therapist generating hope and the last 15% relied on specific interventions using chaplains/therapist's skills and training. 3 years or more education for 15% impact.

Chaplains have routines but God has an override. We start each day with a plan but then life happens.

As I waited in the hospital lobby for a meeting with the head of nursing, I watched an incredibly elegant woman move through the room. I remember thinking, when I grow up, I want to have such poise and grace. As she moved across the lobby, she turned in my direction and began walking toward me. I didn't recognise her at first as a colleague from long ago but she came into focus just as she walked into my arms. She had just come out of the oncologist's office diagnosed with stage 4 lung cancer – and walked straight into my arms. I didn't even know they were open. I was meant to be there – on the south road.

My fellow ministers meet every Tuesday morning to talk about the lectionary. They are a learned lot, with considerable wisdom and a great deal of knowledge. Often the conversation wanders off topic and we have robust

² "What works in grief counselling: US evidence on Australian experience" by Dr David Morawelz

differences of view on occasions. When asked, “Did Jesus break the law?” – the conversation veered wildly.

Two of us with legal backgrounds said that Jesus, in most parts, did not break the law but interpreted the law in a new and fresh way – or more to the point, perhaps as the law was intended before the religious authorities wrote tomes and tomes about what we *should* do. I said, I am sure God did not dictate what cloths we could wear or mix with others. That *had* to be human invention. Thus followed a heated debate in defence of Leviticus.

Amongst the brouhaha, a minister veered to left and mentioned that although some cars already have complete self-driving capabilities – it will never be a complete success. The reason is that the cars software can only follow the road rules. They are hard-wired to the rules and to avoid collision. That means in a dangerous situation, a human must override because the car cannot make decisions that go against the rules. For example, speed up over the limit to avoid being T-boned at an intersection, or swerve to the other side of the road to avoid a collision. They **MUST** follow the road rules – or stop.

So since we were heading down a side road, another minister told us he has an EV with total self-driving capabilities and late one night on an empty road, he tested it out. The car has a failsafe. When he took his hands off the wheel, alarms went off and the car told him if he did not put his hands back on the wheel, it would shut down all systems... in seconds! In other words, it would stop. Where it was – in the middle of the road.

Fail safe and overrides are built into the system. The same with airplanes but it wasn't auto-pilot that landed safely on the Hudson.

At this point, I talked about 2nd reading speeches. When a new law is drafted, before it is brought into law, it is introduced to Parliament in a 2nd reading speech. The purpose of the speech is to explain what the law is about, what problem it is solving and what the intended outcome should be. This speech becomes the Bible that judges return to through the centuries when deciding cases. No matter what tiny element of the statute is being argued, no matter how the law is being twisted to apply to another subject, the judge will go back to what was intended.

To prove my point, I quoted Matthew 22:34-40

³⁴ But when the Pharisees heard that He had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together. ³⁵ Then one of them, a lawyer, asked *Him a question*, testing Him, and saying, ³⁶ “Teacher, which *is* the great commandment in the law?”

³⁷ Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ ³⁸ This is *the* first and great commandment. ³⁹ And *the* second *is* like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’ ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”

Notice Jesus talks to lawyers – a lot.

Anyway, what Jesus has done is put the law into context. For me, this is the 2nd reading speech. He says **ALL** law should be interpreted through this lens.³ Grace and love, hospitality and service must come before your responsibilities to all the other rules. Just as you would feed your animals on the sabbath because it would be wrong to let them starve. There is an Override. A Failsafe switch that puts love before the law.

So why does Jesus rub it in – putting them to shame? “You Hypocrites!!”, He says. Because as we heard last week Jesus chided people in their ability to read the wind but not see the glory of God before them – even when it’s in their face. Here was an act of God – in their faces. The woman was cured.

Yes, the healing of the woman is a metaphor for the political problems facing Israel at the time but it is also a restoration INTO community and life and, more importantly, AWAY from evil. She was “crippled by a spirit”. **Not** to free her would be to stand on side of the devil.

In this case, Jesus is the failsafe – the override.

Jeremiah didn’t think he had it in him. He was just a boy. How many times have we said the same about ourselves? I am “just”(fill in the blank) housewife, working man, child, ordinary person – yet we all have the spirit within us. Ordinary people do extraordinary things.

Perhaps if you truly believe God goes before us, you will understand it is the “Override” that puts the right words in our mouths, the right actions in our feet. Then, you can do it, even when you think you can’t.

³ Like the *Acts Interpretation Act 1901*

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Ever present God, guide me every day, override me when I need it. Amen