

Homily for People and Parishes

Bishop Cam Venables – Sunday, 21st September 2025 – Pentecost 15

Readings: Jeremiah 8:18 – 9:1
1 Timothy 2:1-10

Psalm 79:1-9
Luke 16:1-13

Last Tuesday, Papua New Guinea celebrated fifty years as an independent country. I was fortunate to live in PNG as a volunteer from 1986 to 1990, and as a priest from 1996 to 2000. Consequently, there are friends and communities in PNG who have been very formative in my journey of life and faith, and who continue to be a blessing.

Over the years I have often heard how PNG has also been a significant part in the life journeys of other people. People born in PNG because their parents were working there. People who have worked in PNG with the government, with business, or with a church. People who have visited PNG as tourists, and people who have studied in Australian schools and universities alongside students from PNG.

If you haven't travelled to PNG, I encourage you to consider it because there are many beautiful places in that country, and many wonderful people. PNG forms one half of the second largest island in the world and it has extraordinary natural resources. In a small but rapidly growing population of 11.8 million¹ there are at least 850 languages spoken, which makes for a culturally rich and diverse society.

With significant income from natural resources, it would be reasonable to hope that healthcare, education, infrastructure, and business activity are developing well. However, this is not the case, and many things are not as they could be. Teachers and health workers often struggle to get paid; schools and health centres are too often under-resourced; and there is an ongoing sense of frustration – particularly in the urban areas.

Leading academics suggest that the most significant factors inhibiting the development of Papua New Guinea are economic mismanagement, and high levels of corruption.²

An estimated 93% of PNG's population belongs to a Christian Church. So, it seems surprising that corruption is part of the established culture for many elected representatives and public servants. This finds expression particularly in dealings with businesses, developers, corporations, NGO's, and international aid donors, and the consequences are catastrophic. People die because hospital and health centre pharmacies do not have the necessary medication for treatment. The latent potential of many students in schools and universities is not realised because adequate funds do not reach those

institutions to pay for staff, resources, research, and ongoing development. It is a frustrating reality for many...

The Gospel reading this weekend describes Jesus telling a story about the behaviour of a corrupt manager who has been found out. Charges have been laid, and the owner demands accountability. The corrupt manager realises that he will soon be out of a job and so buys friendship with a heap of people who owe money to the owner. He does this by falsifying the records... and, surprisingly, the owner commends him for this 'shrewd' behaviour!

Some commentaries suggest that this would have been a plausible situation and that nobody's hands would have been clean! Technically the owner was also at fault because he should not have allowed huge debts to accumulate by charging interest over time.

It seems initially that Jesus is affirming a corrupt practice, but I think the intention is to remind us about a significant human trait. Namely – that we're pretty good at self-interest! It was a reality in first century Palestine, and it is an ongoing reality in twenty first century society: both in Papua New Guinea and Australia.

The story of the corrupt manager primes the pump for Jesus to deliver some uncompromising teaching about faithfulness and idolatry. If we are faithful in little, we will be faithful in much! If we are dishonest in little, we will be dishonest in much!

Then there is this hint about where we need to be with God. If we have a sense that God is central to who we are then we will be more likely to consider that all we know in life is a gift, and not a right. That each breath and heartbeat – each life-giving friendship – the food we eat – the water we drink – the places we call home... are gifts from a God who loves us.

I think when God is central to who we are, we are infinitely more likely to be thankful, to be generous, to be helpful, to be kind, to be compassionate, to be loving, to be patient, to be honest, and... to be faithful. Faithful in the way we treat other people. Faithful in the way we use resources. Faithful in the way *'we live, and move, and have our being'* (Acts 17:28).

The last verse of the reading is one that I hope reverberates in our minds through the days of this week, *"No slave can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth..."* (Luke 16:13).

I think this is confronting for we do not live in a society that has slaves, and to think of God, or Jesus, as our 'Master' may seem strange and even oppressive. It is more comfortable to think of Jesus as a friend and a brother; a buddy, or a mate... rather than our 'master'.

In the life of a slave – the master is central to that person and determines what they do, how they live, and where they go.

Bearing this in mind, can we sing with our whole heart the lyrics of that fabulous old hymn – *'O Jesus, I have promised to serve you to the end; Lord, be forever near me, **my master and my friend**: I shall not fear the battle if you are by my side, nor wander from the pathway if you will be my guide...'*? (TiS 595).

In our prayers this week, please remember the people of Papua New Guinea and all who exercise leadership in the life of that nation. Please pray also for the Anglican Church of Papua New Guinea – for all bishops, clergy and people as they seek, like us, to be vibrant and loving communities of faith.

Perhaps we could also pray for a deeper understanding of what it means to call Christ, 'Master and friend'.

Please join with me as I close in prayer...

"Loving, liberating, and life-giving God, we thank you for all the good things we too often take for granted! We pray for peace and blessing in places that have need of these things – especially for the peoples of Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, and Papua New Guinea. We pray also for insight and wisdom about the things that distract us from being faithful to you, and to your teaching. We pray in the name of the one who calls us to follow, Jesus Christ – our Master and Friend. Amen"

¹ [Papua New Guinea country brief | Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade](#)

² 'The Embarrassed Colonialist', ©Sean Dorney, Lowy Institute - Penguin Books 2016