



Disability Awareness Sunday
Rev Linda Murphy
Ordinary 11
Matthew 9:35-10:8
18 June 2023

Today is Disability Awareness Sunday which is booked into our lectionary every year on the third Sunday of June.

If you have a disability, I don't need to explain to you the obstacles you face, but how do we engage on a practical level with those who are disabled?

At St Matthews we have a hearing loop and move pews to accommodate those who use wheelchairs, but I wonder if really we are aware what a disability is, and that we are surrounded by whanau who obvious disabilities and others with less obvious disabilities.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) defines a disability as any long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder the full and effective participation of disabled people in society on an equal basis with others.

The experience of disability is influenced by the nature of a person's impairment.

Gender, age, ethnicity, and culture can also have a profound and sometimes compounding effect on an individual's experience of disability.

An impairment can be intellectual, psychiatric, physical, neurological, or sensory, and be temporary, intermittent, or ongoing. People may acquire an impairment through an accident or illness, and/or a person may be

born with an impairment. Multiple impairments are common, especially with increasing age.

In my work at Te Tapui Atawhai (ACM) I see disabilities every day, in many different guises. We have whanau with amputations, who are wheelchair bound, we have others who have hearing loss, and sight impairment.

There are those who are constantly fearful, preventing them from taking pleasure in life.

The effect of rough sleeping often leads to impairments that shorten life.

My list could go on and on.

While sleeping rough itself is not classified as a disability, the health issues associated with homelessness can qualify as disabilities depending on the impact on an individual's ability to perform major life activities.

In some cases, individuals who have disabilities or health conditions, resulting from homelessness, may be eligible for disability benefits or support programmes, depending on the specific policies and regulations of their country or region.

Today's Gospel is a true witness to the message Jesus was giving the disciples (and us). That is, Christians recognizing how God has empowered us, through the Holy Spirit, to be bold and courageous for the sake of the Gospel message.

This is not a message of empowered and inspired individualism.

This is a message of recognising that we have been empowered to see the world around us.

Particularly to see the people in the world who are often overlooked and ignored, and to act on their behalf in ways that address the circumstances that endanger their lives and communities.

Jesus' compassion for others, is often sparked by a single observation, where "others" are "harassed and helpless," and we must do something to address it.

We hold the value of manaakitanga here at St Matthews and at Te Tapui Atawhai.

We are challenged by our Gospel today to follow in the steps of Jesus "to proclaim the good news that the kingdom of heaven has come near."

How do we proclaim the Good News, particularly to disabled or impaired whanau?

It is often the practical actions of welcoming, inclusion and manaakitanga that show the kingdom of heaven is near.

Manaakitanga means hospitality, kindness, generosity, support. It is the process of showing respect, generosity and care for others and importantly upholding their mana.

Homeground was intentionally designed as trauma informed, to meet the needs of the community we care for and support. So, we have a building with stress reducing physical spaces.

There are times when I find myself feeling that our building achieves this but there are other moments when the environment is stressful.

While trauma may not appear to be a disability, it certainly impacts on the lives of our whanau, to the extent they often cannot function, thereby preventing them from living positive and fulfilling lives.

What can we do to be more aware to the needs of those in our local communities and our community here at St Matthews?

Manaakitanga is more than being welcoming, it is about building relationships with those around us.

Giving time, listening, being there and offering hope.

During the week, our Outreach Team asked me to see one of our rough sleepers who was asking to see me. This man has been rough sleeping for the twenty years I have been involved with the homeless community. He is distrustful of everyone, but at times would talk with Wilf or me.

It was a very chilly morning, but we found him in a sunny spot. He greeted me with a lovely smile and asked if he could go on the benefit and he was thinking about coming indoors. I was overjoyed at this because he had not been on a benefit for many years.

When we returned to see him in the afternoon, with confirmation that he could go back on a benefit, and all he had to do was sign some papers, he was lying on the ground and appeared very unwell.

Our outreach nurse arrived and checked him out and the saddest part of this exchange was he pleaded with us not to talk about rough sleeping and his health. He had such whakama or shame about his lifestyle. He is also fearful of having an interview with MSD let alone coming to Calder Health to see a GP.

He did not sign the papers, so he will not be on a benefit next week, but the Outreach Team will continue to visit him and monitor his health and ensure he has food.

Manaakitanga takes time and is not easy to achieve for many of our whanau.

On this Disability Awareness Sunday let all of us look at what we can do to improve our hospitality, our welcoming, our generosity towards all those we meet and see.

Remembering that these are the signs that the kingdom of heaven is near.