

**Sermon 01 September 2019****Readings: Luke 14: 1, 7-14****The Culture of Entitlement****Message: We need to abandon the culture of entitlement if we want to save our world.**

This week I was really impressed by the humility of the All Black prop Owen Franks, when he found out he'd been dropped from the All Blacks. Coach Steve Hanson described Franks as one of New Zealand's Rugby Greats. After playing 108 Tests in the black jersey, and not being selected, Franks made the comment: "I know that nothing is owed to me". "Nothing is owed to me".

I don't know how you interpret that comment, but I interpret it as, 'I don't feel a sense of entitlement to selection - even after playing 108 tests.' Franks is only 30 years old and I'm sure he has a lot more gas left in the tank. But like all great New Zealanders Franks has shown the trait of the humility that we so admire in New Zealand heroes.

**Anyone who has lived with privilege is tempted to feel a sense of entitlement.** You may not feel as though you are privileged but compared to the Third World and even some First World countries, we are very privileged to live in this part of the world.

I suggest that most of us here this morning have lived with privilege at some time during our lives. You might like to reflect on your own life and the times when you were aware of your privileged life. As a community leader. As a property owner. As a boss in your old job; as a traveller overseas in a third World country.

**I have lived with privilege during certain portions of my lifetime.** As the son of a Samoan Matai (High Chief), I grew up with the experienced of privilege in the very hierarchical Samoan society. We weren't at the top of the hierarchy, but we weren't at the bottom either. As a military Chaplain and as a Commissioned Officer, I experienced the privileges that came with rank. When I left the Defence Force, I left in the rank of a Lt Colonel/Navy Commander. Even as a Minister, I've sometimes felt uncomfortable even with the privilege of having my own carpark in the parishes I've served.

And perhaps the reason for my discomfort is that I'm aware of the Servant Leadership that Jesus modelled in his lifetime. He washed the feet of his disciples. In a conversation with his disciples he told them: I am among you as one who serves. I came to serve and not to be served ... In another place he said: The first shall be last and the last shall be first. During his lifetime Jesus walked and sat *alongside* people of all kinds rather than above them or in front of them. He was one of the people.

**Jesus had a lot to say about privilege and the culture of entitlement.** In the reading from Luke this morning we heard how Jesus was at a feast at the home of a leading Pharisee. He noticed that certain people felt 'entitled' to sit in the places of honour. And he told the parable about a wedding where guests who sat in the places of privilege, until someone more important arrived and they were embarrassed at being asked to take a lower seat at the banquet.

The lesson or the punchline of His parable was: *<sup>11</sup>For all who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.'*

**Humility is not something that comes easily to people who have tried to be achievers all of their lives. Sometimes there's a tension between being humble and being successful.** Being humble is sometimes thought of as a form of self-hatred where we must think of ourselves as a kind of doormat. I don't think Jesus ever expected his followers to be like that. When I think of that kind of humility, I think of the Charles Dickens character Uriah Heep – in David Copperfield – Uriah Heep with his creepy, anaemic, false humility. Jesus himself was no door mat and was nothing like Uriah Heep.

***A more helpful definition of humility is to neither overestimate, nor underestimate yourself.***

***Humility by that definition means using your abilities to the full and not under-achieving or doing less than you are able to do.***

**We should be grateful for the gifts and abilities God gives us for our own benefit and for the benefit of others.**

In the parable of the wedding feast Jesus went on to say something even more radical and difficult to put into practice: *'When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends or your brothers or your relatives or rich neighbours, in case they may invite you in return, and you would be repaid. <sup>13</sup>But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. <sup>14</sup>And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you, for you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'*

**Our focus is not to be on ourselves – or even on the church – but on the world outside our comfortable circle of family and friends. To sacrifice comfort in a radical kind of discipleship. We cannot do that and maintain a sense of entitlement.**

**In 2018 a film called, 'Anote's Ark' followed the life and work of Anote Tong, the former President of Kiribati. Kiribati is a Pacific Island nation, thousands of miles away from anywhere - It is the proverbial 'out of sight, out of mind'. But it is home to 100,000 people and 4,000 years of rich culture; but it is slipping into the sea and will be gone forever due to the ravages of climate change. New Zealand is already the new home to people fleeing Kiribati.**

In an interview, President Tong commented that for the first time in history we know the damage climate change is doing and it is the last time in history we will be able to stop it. *He went further to challenge the 'developed' countries whose consumption is driving climate change.* His words are powerful! **When you know what you are doing is harming someone else and you continue to do it, it is assault. Please stop doing it!**

**This week there was international outrage over the fires in South America** – some of which are deliberately lit at this time of the year to create land for agriculture. Somehow the fires are out of control and continue to destroy the rainforests. The extent of the fires is now larger than Western Europe. The leaders of Brazil, Bolivia, Peru and Paraguay have called for international help. *Some of the South American leaders point out that historically almost all developed nations have burnt off their forests to create land for agriculture and that the finger shouldn't be pointed at South America alone.*

In other words, we are all guilty of the crime of Climate Change. Our sense of entitlement has not led us to a better world for ourselves or our grandchildren.

The words of President Anote Tong may come back to bite us: He commented that ***for the first time in history we know the damage climate change is doing and it is the last time in history we will be able to stop it.***

We cannot maintain a culture of Entitlement. Somehow, we have to find ways to work with all nations to save our planet for the good of all.

For Christ, the invitation to the table is not simply for the privileged and the entitled, but for all people, who have an equal value in the heart of God.

**FSHS Amen.**