

LOVE FOR OUR COMMUNITY

Nic Denny-Dimitriou - 19 November 2006

A sermon in conjunction with the Worldwide Day of Remembrance for Accident Victims

With Sandy Lund, guest Caro Smit (*) & other members of the community

(*) Caro Smit's story, provided in text by Caro, is separate to these notes. They will be separately placed on our church's website.

- Caro Smit probably needs no introduction
 - Media coverage after death of Chas just over a year ago
 - Her sister, Sandy Lund, is part of our congregation, as are many lifelong family friends, some of whom have also lost members of families in car accidents
 - Lately wide media coverage incl. The Witness, due to organisation Caro founded: SADD [South Africans Against Drunk Driving]
 - Invited her to share some personal aspects of her family's story
 - The service has been planned together with me by Sandy Lund and other members of the congregation, and by Caro as our guest today

CARO'S STORY

- Response to Caro's story: Not "just any story" but one of the most personal and anguished things any parent / any person can ever have to deal with
- Just over 1 year ago, our congregation was deeply affected by the sudden deaths in accidents of 3 members of the congregation: The sisters Sandra and Alison McLean, and soon thereafter of Sally Cornish.
- Many others affected; other deaths; 5 yrs ago – Matthew Paolo of our congregation was killed by a driver slamming into the rear of his vehicle; his girlfriend remains paralysed. Others have lost friends, colleagues; some carry the pain of loss of family, including young children, from decades ago, including retired priest, Arthur and his wife Anne, whose son of 5 years' old was tragically killed. Though these events happened decades ago, they tell us the extent of the problem, experienced even in this small congregation in this small community in our country.
- For today, didn't need to reel off list of statistics. Good to have and to know. Yet anyone who is not aware of severity of accident or drunk-driving stats needs to be asked, "From which planet do you come?"
 - Worldwide Remembrance Day
 - Acknowledge people's pain
 - Respond to the issues behind the statistics

- What are some of the ways in which we can respond?
 - Seemed best to encourage reflection on how we live in our community; to encourage us to reflect on our own attitudes and behaviour and habits
 - Could become angry / moralistic / self-righteous – but would that be helpful?
 - [Note: Anger is a very normal reaction – not suggesting there is no place for it, but question whether continued anger on its own would be helpful. Need to re-direct energy...]

- Therefore, our purpose as a Christian congregation is to reflect theologically. In other words, consider these matters in the light of our faith

[Even aside from the issue of suffering and pain, of general sin in the world to which we are all party and all of us therefore cause pain to others and aggravate the evil and lack of harmony in the world God created ...]

- If we believe in a Good and Loving God, what difference should that make to how we live and drive?

A few issues:

- How we drive: Love to criticise “other people” (we all have our favourites – taxi drivers; tailgaters; dangerous over-takers; aggressive drivers – many driving styles and affects all types vehicles!)
- But what about us? South Africans travelling or living overseas discover how lawless we are!
 - Australia (high enforcement rates, drunk driving brought down enormously; speed limit often 110kph, rarely exceeded; South Africans are even so used to parking on yellow lines they are regularly ticketed until they learn...)
 - NZ (If only two deaths on the roads at Christmas, it makes headlines)
 - England and Europe
 - Speed, seatbelts, mobile phones, yellow and red line parking, ignoring reserved parking for the disabled...
- “Love even your enemies, do good and not evil, do not repay evil with evil...”
- These are words of Jesus, directly from today’s Gospel Reading. Could an ethic from that even apply on our roads?

- Attitudes to driving and alcohol: Bravado
 - Example of a father who lost son in accident caused by a drunk driver; the driver was known to be heavily intoxicated to the extent people tried to remove keys & a passenger refused to travel with driver... caused the death of this man’s son

- Yet friends and business associates of same man regularly boasted or joked about driving home intoxicated from events – and more than one, with a possible charge of drunk driving, had boasted getting off the charge thanks to good legal representation! This is a true story, of business and professional white middle class people in our metropolitan area of PMB and the Midlands! The man felt obliged to seek different company in his friendships, realising that tolerance to such prevalent attitudes had indirectly resulted in the death of his son!

Would we tolerate same attitudes... if it were rape?!

- Imagine if we had the same attitude to rape or molestation amongst our friends and business associates? So why do we continue to tolerate bravado when it comes to driving and alcohol, which can also result in death and destruction of lives?

Look at the Scripture readings today:

- **Matthew 5: 38-48**
 - Jesus: even love for enemies; going the extra kilometre;
 - We can choose how to respond to these situations (anger / not; forgiveness / bitterness; not glib ... takes a while to move towards the position and attitudes encouraged by Jesus)
- **1 Corinthians 13**
 - Famous passage – love to read at weddings (very appropriately)
 - However, not addressed to married couples, but to Christian community at large about they live together and how they live their lives in the community
- **James 2:14-17**
 - Faith and deeds go together!
 - Practical, relevant to people's needs
 - Faith, unaccompanied by appropriate deeds, is worthless!
- I'm sure we've got the picture by now, that believers in God and followers of Jesus Christ who proclaim him the Lord, and the Saviour, are required to give loving consideration for others in how we live
- Last week we saw how: **“People matter” to Jesus**
- Previous week: **“Doing everything, aware of the presence of God with us at all times and in all places”**
- The “Methodism” Christian movement, encouraged by Charles and John Wesley – famous Christian leaders of a couple of centuries ago in an England characterised by poverty, disease and awful social situations going through the

Industrial Revolution, encouraged people on a weekly basis **“to avoid evil, to do no harm, and to do all the good they could for as many as possible”**.

As disciples of Jesus Christ, our lives need to embody these things.

ENDS