

**Outward Focus of the Gospel
 Sunday 16 January 2011
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 Church of the Ascension
 The Anglican Church in Hilton, KZN**

Readings: See from Intro below

**Sermon Notes – Sunday 16 January 2011
 Nic Denny-Dimitriou, Hilton**

TIME (December 6, 2010 – Special Edition with focus on Years 2000–2010)

Article: You can't spell TIME without 'I' and 'Me!' - Joel Stein

- Brief excerpts, quotes
- Comments in letter 2 weeks later highlighting different approaches to article (1 x "frivolous", 1 x "superb commentary, cleverly done"); I take the latter view ...

A profound, accurate commentary on contemporary life / obsession with self

Yet we need to focus inwards too, not all bad

Personal reflections, thoughtfulness, even i.t.o our faith

Can make own decisions

Freedom of choice, faith, different and "not mainstream" without danger

Creativity, development etc.

Therefore not about to preach sermon purely against inner focus

BUT

Profound comment on contemporary society, esp. educated affluent western middle class society (like most of us)

Encourages selfishness

Failure to appreciate needs of others

Minimal community / sense of belonging, connectedness with humanity

Minimal empathy with others

Keep to myself

Experience and express our faith "as we are" – we are people of our time

Prevailing thought and ways of living affect our faith, and I want to say that

Our faith is not purely for private benefit but for the wider and public good. It is for sharing, and our faith challenges us to go beyond a private, selfish focus.

Sometimes we are conscious of prevailing social contexts – like excessive individualism that cuts others out of life's considerations unless it personally benefits us. If conscious of it, can remedy it, change focus (even over time), be transformed.

But if unaware of it, we live life and faith without chance of transformation, without awareness of an excessively private and selfish focus being far removed from the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Scripture readings this morning – highlight aspects of each, relevant to theme:

In the Gospel (John 1: 29-34), the writer John telling part of the story of Jesus and John the Baptist, wanting people to recognise Jesus as the Messiah, God's Anointed One

In the NT Reading (1 Corinthians 1: 1-9) - Paul's concern for the Church in Corinth and the spread of the Gospel

Isaiah 49:1-7

Isaiah's – and God's – concern for the people of Israel

“Light to the Gentiles”

Big stuff! (elaborate)

Little Israel, punching above its weight in the world

Understood not as “political Israel” – but those who understand themselves as the community of God's People

The thrust of Good News (OT/ NT, both) is outwards, not inwards

Challenge for us

Naturally selfish - human nature since the beginning of recorded humanity

Then Western Individualism emphasised on top of that

Some of us more outgoing by nature, others of us are reserved by nature – but that's about personality temperament, and the outgoing person may be just as selfish or even more so than a person who is reserved by nature

But my task this morning is not to burden us with heaps of guilt that leave us walking out here feeling that we are useless or terrible or no-hopers. And many of us have grappled with these issues and many of us would protest if labelled purely in negative terms as Selfish Individualists with no concern for wider community!

Some affected areas:

Prayer (for others, in addition to praying for ourselves)
 Concern for others
 Empathy
 Compassion (feel with...)
 Challenge to natural selfishness / preoccupation with self & own issues
 Sharing Gospel – about Jesus
 Coming to church – recognise wider community, part of it, learn in it and with it and from it; play our part in it; strengthen our faith – not purely for private benefit but for how we live in the community

People of Grace
 “Salt and light” (salt adds flavour, releases flavour, a preservative)
 Use of resources – expertise, time
 Finances
 Parish giving, Social Responsibility (thanks in leaflets – more to follow)
 Diocese (Assessments – inspiration - Umlazi parish, to repeat a previously told story)

Gospel Challenge:

Embrace wider perspectives for our lives
 Be a light to all, in the name of Jesus Christ
 Not one long round of self-seeking pleasure and selfish endeavour
 Good News of God is to be shared

As we continue into 2011, we need to continue to allow the outward-bound focus of the Gospel to challenge our individual and parish focus, so that it informs and transforms our perspectives on life and how we live our faith!