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Volume 1, Issue 6

The Virtuous Thomas

Eseta Mateiviti preaches:

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable to you my rock and redeemer.

What we have just heard from Johns Gospel is an awesome story. A story of a disciple of Jesus who had to face his suffering and sorrow alone after Jesus' death. Awesome, because of the way his doubts became sure and his unbelief became believable. This is also a story of trust. Thomas trusted Jesus only and felt that the stories he had just heard from his friends are only talanoa's and nothing more. Let me begin with a talanoa.

A little girl and her father were crossing a bridge. The father was kind of scared so he asked his daughter, "sweet heart please hold my hand so that you don't fall into the river". The little girl said "No, dad, you hold my hand".

"What's the difference?" asked the puzzled father. "There is a big difference replied the little girl. "If I hold your hand and something happens to me chances are that I may let your hands go. But if you hold my hand I know for sure that no matter what happens you will never let my hands go. In relationships, the essence of trust is not in its bind but in its bond. The story we have just heard is one that we can all learn a lesson from just like Thomas' talanoa in the bible. So, talanoa's either binds or destroys a relationship. Talanoa's are part of our identity and is important in our lives. Without stories there is no articulation or conversations of experience. A talanoa can either be a chat, an informal or formal discussion, a story, a myth or a legend and the list could go on. Talanoa's also migrate from one person to another. These are talanoa's that could not be contained and it goes round in circles and by the time it reaches the concerned person it has a probability of 10% truth and 90% lies. There are talanoa's which are confidential

and are put across to the other person because there is trust that the talanoa's would be in good hands but it gets out of hand because of the nature of our context as we in the Pacific are more oral in nature and do not consider anything to be confidential. This is similar to the way the disciples disclosed the story of the risen Lord to Thomas. Their story to Thomas is something they could not contain, it is something that has brought about excitement and needs to be told to everyone of them, even those who had disappeared like Thomas.

The Bible is clear that a person's identity cannot be fully grasped through definitions but through stories. The story before us is about a disciple. His experience seen through the conversations in Johns gospel is related to anyone's experience of winning a rugby world cup lottery ticket, someone who has just found a missing relative or someone who had just graduated from the University and the list could go on.

And so this morning I invite us all to enter into Thomas' story, to look at this passage through his experience. Let him be the one to speak to us through scripture.

Thomas according to Johns gospel is one of the twelve and he is also known as Didymus, the twin. In the other three gospels Thomas was mentioned only once when Jesus was naming and calling out his twelve disciples. When Jesus had proposed going to Bethany after the news of Lazarus' illness in John 11:16 Thomas' reaction had been 'let us go that we may die with him'. To Thomas the cross was only what he had expected and he had loved him enough to be willing to go to Jerusalem and die with him when the other disciples were hesitant and afraid. During the

time when Jesus was taken away to be crucified, Thomas was broken hearted, so broken hearted that he could not go out to see the others but was alone in his grief. Throughout his grief and sorrow he had no knowledge of Jesus' first appearance to



Eseta Mateiviti is currently in her final year of her PhD at the University of Auckland. This sermon was delivered at Holy Trinity Cathedral, Suva for the service for new ordinands on 1st May 2011 at the Diocese of Polynesia Synod.

the women in the Tomb and he was only told of Jesus' second appearance when he came to see the disciples who were locked indoors. However, Thomas' demands for concrete evidence set the stage for Jesus' appearance.

Another week elapsed and Jesus came back again and this time Thomas was there. Imagine what would it be like if someone you loved was lost at sea 3 days ago and you had heard over the radio that he had been found in another island. Like Thomas you would go to the place where your loved one would appear for the first time, whether it was at the airport, Jetty or at home. You would want to be one of the first ones to see him, touch him and just to be near him all the time. You would be filled deeply with emotions. Like Thomas you would be moved from unbelief to belief. Jesus offers Thomas exactly what he demanded and moved him from a position of unbelief to belief. Moved and filled with emotions Thomas exclaimed "My Lord and my God"

What does the character of Thomas being out to you and me? There are three ways in which Thomas' character stands out;

Firstly, Thomas completely withdrew himself from being with other Christians after Jesus' death. He wanted to be alone rather than being together. And because he was not there with his fellow Christian brothers and sisters he missed the first and second appearances of Jesus. We miss a great deal when we separate ourselves from the Christian fellowship and try to be alone. I picked up a story from our eastern bays suburban newspaper and it had a story about a young Fijian boy named Varayame Batini who dreamt that one day he would walk. As he grew older he suddenly became paralysed but he never shut himself up at home and was always at the roadside selling food crops from his fathers farm. A tourist who was here in Fiji spoke to him and had since taken Varayame to Auckland for surgery and guess what? She later found out that he had started moving his toes. Varayame's story is about believing that the impossible will happen and unlike Thomas Varayame never shut himself up but he came out and met his Saviour in the like of a tourist who is now doing a documentary about the boy who believed that one day he will walk side by side with his mum. For the new ordinands your mission out there in your different parishes is not yours alone so do not separate yourself from your family. If you can allow yourself to be transparent with your God then you should also allow yourself to be transparent with your family as well. Share your stories with your family at home so that they can be with you on your spiritual journey. When my father was serving in the different parishes we as children went about our studies and knew little about what happens in the parish but the only way we would know that my father was coming against a goliath in the parish is when my mum would offer it to God during our evening prayers. Each of us has that Thomas character in our lives, where we want to shut ourselves out from every other things. Therefore, every time in spite of our sorrow we should always seek the fellowship of Christ's people starting

with your family, especially your wife or husband, for it is there that you are likely to meet Jesus face to face just like Thomas did.

Another great virtue of Thomas was honesty. He would never keep quiet about his doubts by pretending they did not exist. He would never do anything without understanding it first. There is more faith in people who insist on being sure. To be sure is to trust and trust comes with faith. The little girl in my first talanoa was sure and had a lot of trust in her father. It is not touching Jesus that leads to Thomas' confession of faith but Jesus' gracious offer of himself. People sometimes lose faith in people because of their age and words like 'Oh! He is too young, he can't do the job' is uttered most of the time.

For the new ordinands, members of the Synod and young people I would like to challenge you today to take up Thomas' virtue of honesty and talk about your doubts when it comes to serving your parish and your Diocese. Let us use the talanoa sessions during Synod to bring out those doubts. The more we talanoa or korero (*Māori term for talanoa*) honestly and openly the more excited we will be about God's call for mission. For the ordinands you should spend most of your time on your knees and be having more talanoa's with your God, your young people, your Sunday school, your men's group, your women's group or your parishioners as a whole. Let us all take this virtue forward like a mission into the field wherever we will be serving.

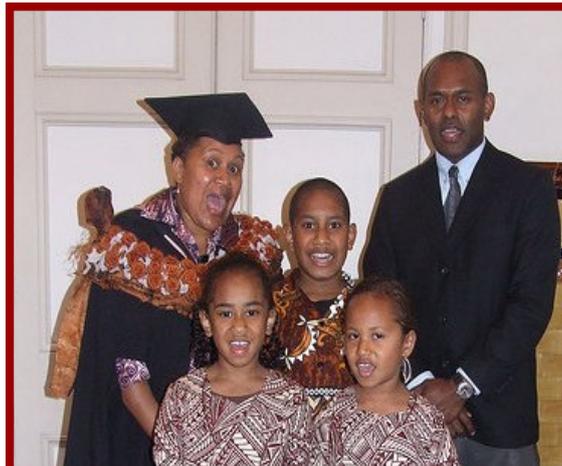
Let us be transparent and accountable to the calling he has for us.

The final virtue of Thomas was when he was sure and went all the way. He was sure of who Jesus was when he exclaimed, 'My Lord and My God!' The use of 'my' as a personal pronoun shows how close he was to Jesus. His confession leaves no doubt about Jesus' relation to the Father. For the new ordinands Thomas' surety will be seen in the promises that you are about to make before God today and the people you will serve. 'Are you sure you are ready to serve your people and fulfil God's calling in your life no matter what?' And for us the people of God 'Are we sure we are going to support them no matter what? Or are we going to become like big goliaths.

Here is a man who had something to offer about Jesus. His reality check about the nails on Jesus' hands makes it sound so real like it just happened yesterday. His reality check and exclamation put Jesus as one that is divinely ordained. His gift to us it is through this, his honesty about seeing is believing...

Therefore the virtues of Thomas is something that should always remain with us as we leave or depart from this church. Are we sure and are not in doubt to what we are going out to? Are we going to spend time with our God and feel those nails of TRUST? Do we have time to talanoa honestly with our families and the different groups within our parishes? For it is by answering these questions individually and doing what we should do will we come face to face with our risen LORD.

In the name of the FATHER, SON and HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN



Eseta Mateiviti with her husband Moape Tulavu and their children letting loose after Eseta graduated with her MA with Honours in 2008.

Women in Ministry Provincial Hui

PASTOR AND PROPHET

Women in Ordained Ministry

27th—29th October 2011
Vaughan Park Retreat Centre

The first Ordained Women's Conference was held in 1987, which was the 10th anniversary of the first ordination of Anglican women in New Zealand. The impact of this gathering was very important for all who attended as it was the first time many of the ordained women had met one another, or even heard of one another! Also it was a first opportunity provided to spend time with female colleagues on a national basis. Friendships formed at this conference ultimately led to the ordination of the first woman bishop for this church—The Right Revd Penny Jamieson. This conference enabled on-going networking and supportive links across the church, especially where there continued to be very significant discrimination for many of the women. It was the source of encouragement to publish, create liturgy, and develop the beginnings of a database for future appointments through the work of the Auckland Women's Resource Centre.

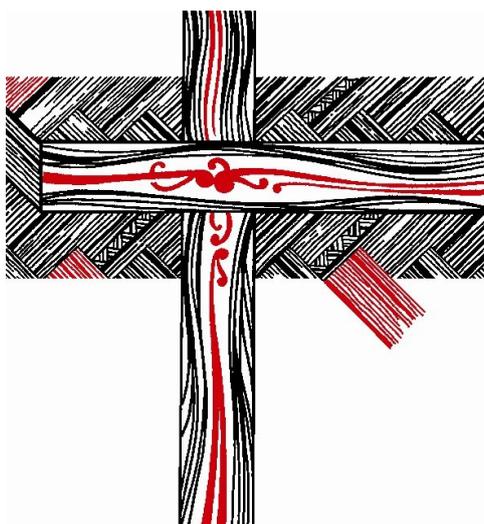
Women in ordained ministry have particular roles and relationships with the church and have many expectations laid on them. The real depth of these in our current context is ready to be uncovered again. For instance there are ordained women in lonely places, others in vulnerable spaces where who they are, is subject of debate and even threat

of being unable to minister. It is hard to find places to look at our issues now, especially as women's ministry has become "normalised" and we are expected to "get on with it".

We are still under-represented in the senior levels of governance and management in the church—not only at Bishop and General Synod levels, but in such commissions as Social Justice and Liturgy. We have much to contribute to them all. Knowing who we are together as colleagues and a chance to speak of what is important to us at this time is a real need: it will be an opportunity to bring fresh understandings and perspectives on our work in the church, to focus our commitment to the growth and honouring of all ministry, to know each other

and develop meaningful support links, and to become strong again in seeking to bring change and hope to the most needy in our communities.

Therefore, this Hui will be divided up into a number of sessions covering such topics as Gender and Generations, Identity and Whanau, Partnerships and finally Change Making where the roles of Pastor & Prophet will be explored within each of these topics and what they mean to ordained women today.



Very Limited Places Available

If you would like to receive more information regarding this Hui please contact your Link Representative in your Diocese or Hui Amorangi or email anglicanwomenstudies@gmail.com



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The Women's Studies Centre was set up to serve and to advance the interests and needs of the women of this Church particularly those undertaking Theological training.

PASTOR & PROPHET
Women in Ordained Ministry
27-29 October 2011

The Link Representatives from each Diocese and Hui Amorangi have been chosen for their leadership ability to identify, gather, facilitate, resource and encourage women in their educational preparation for ministry whether lay or ordained. It is hoped that the Women's Studies Centre can continue to enjoy the support of each Diocese and Hui Amorangi in this endeavour.

The issue of increasing numbers of women in representative positions across the councils and committees of the Church is seen as a high priority and the practice of intentional mentoring by those already in national and international representative roles is seen as a good way to expose women of this church to fulfill their potential as leaders.

Ensuring that women's voices and stories are heard now and in the future is also one of our continued aims whether it be by traditional methods of publication or using more contemporary technologies like website publication. We remain optimistic that through continued support the needs of women throughout this Province will be valued and recognized.



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