

Sermon preached at OCC, 10 August 2025

May these words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer. (Psalm 19:14)

Luke 12:32-40

A God-Given Vocation and Treasure in Heaven

I first heard about Valerie Browning when I watched a short *60 Minutes Australia* documentary called ‘Meet the Nomadic Tribe, regarded as the greatest survivors’. In the 1980s, nurse Valerie Browning left her comfortable Australian life to live among the Afar, a nomadic tribe in Ethiopia’s dry desert. There she found hardship and beauty, despair and hope. She stayed — not because it was easy, but because she believed it was her God-given vocation. She has worked in sweltering heat, in makeshift clinics, sometimes walking hours to reach expectant mothers — but she calls every moment a privilege. Now in her seventies, she still serves the Afar through maternal healthcare. The respect and love she has gained can never be taken away from her — a treasure in heaven that thieves cannot steal.

Luke’s gospel points us in the same direction — towards a life that treasures what lasts forever. It is the conclusion of Jesus’ teaching on money that begins in verse 22, under the heading “Do not worry.” Jesus is not calling us to an extreme or ascetic life, but to a simple one — a life focused on what truly matters. He speaks of two connected ideas: storing up unfailing treasure in heaven, and being ready like servants waiting for their master’s return. The reward of God is bound up with the life we live now, in obedience and readiness.

This is about vocation, not justification. Jesus calls us to be dressed for service, lamps burning, hearts alert — ready to move when God calls. Like soldiers who train whether there is a war or not, or athletes who prepare daily whether there is a competition or not, we live each day in readiness. The energy that fuels us is gospel-centred: healing, justice, love, grace, and peace.

When the reporter in the documentary called Valerie’s life “an incredible sacrifice,” she disagreed. “No, not at all. It’s a pleasure and absolute privilege,” she said. She believed her life was richer than his, because she had learned the lessons of poverty and hardship — lessons he had not yet learned. Her words echo Paul’s in Philippians: “I know what it is to have little, and

I know what it is to have plenty... I can do all things through him who strengthens me.”¹ Her dream is simple: a tiny nomadic house that could be packed on a camel’s back, and five goats — no more, no less.

Our ministries here at OCC may be different in form, but the same principle applies. Some of our ministries attract people, and we may feel that all our efforts were compensated. Other ministries may go quietly, and they are not even recognised as ministries. Small or big, getting the public attention or not, we are working in the field of God, where God wants to see tiny seeds grow. In the Beatitudes, Jesus says, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” This is a life of total surrender, watchful and ready, like the servants in Luke’s gospel.

When it comes to vocation, sometimes we wrestle: *Is this from God, or just my desire?* On the church level, a local church, Presbytery, and the National Church all work together to discern one’s calling from God. As a member of the National Assessment Workgroup, I have observed the minister candidates who came to the Assessment Weekend. Some of them may have spent sleepless nights discerning if their hearts for the ministry were indeed from God, not from their desires. The church, as the collective body, discerns its calling together.

But God also speaks through the passions that won’t leave us alone — the ideas that keep returning, even in the quiet moments. On a personal level, the role of the lamp filled with oil is our spiritual discipline through prayer, reading and contemplating scripture, worship and fellowship to discern God’s voice continually. Today, God calls men and women to be faithful servants of God, and OCC people are no exception. “If Jesus returned tonight, what would he find in our hands and hearts?”

We are not afraid of what lies ahead, because we are already dressed for action, our lamps are already lit. And along the way, as we walk in obedience, we discover that we already possess the unfailing treasure God has promised. So let us live ready — boots on, lamps burning — knowing that when the Master comes, he will find us faithful. That is our vocation. That is our treasure. Amen.

¹ Philippians 4:12-13