

Along the track

The Year of the Rooster

For Chinese people this is the Year of the Rooster. No offence is intended to those people who fall under this zodiac sign but my father used to say that rooster's crow as the sun rises, hoping that everyone would think they are responsible for it!

He also used to read us the story of the stone soup, attributed to Henry Lawson but it is actually an old European folk story. A swaggie came to town carrying nothing more than an empty cooking pot and a stone. No-one was willing to share any of their food so he went to the creek and filled the pot with water, dropping the [stone](#) in it, and put it on a fire. One by one the townspeople became curious and ask what he's doing. I am making "stone [soup](#)", which tastes wonderful, although it still needs a little bit of something to improve the flavour. So one person does not mind parting with a carrot to help them out. Another walks by, inquiring about the pot, and the swaggie again explains about the stone soup but it could do with a potato perhaps? That goes in the pot. One by one, more and more people visit, each adding another ingredient. Finally, the stone is removed from the pot, and a delicious and nourishing pot of soup is enjoyed by all-comers. Everybody contributed whatever each had, with great results. That's a very abbreviated version but I loved that story.

When Jesus sent out the Twelve to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick, He told them: *"Take nothing for the journey -- no staff, no bag, no bread, no money, no extra tunic. Whatever house you enter, stay there until you leave that town.* Luke 9:1-10

So what does the rooster, the soup and Jesus' instructions have in common? Jesus' instructions weren't simply an exercise about trust in God. It was a reminder to them that it is not all about you! It is a reminder that while we might have much to contribute, we depend on the work of others, the generosity of others. We are always enriched by the generosity of others in our lives and so are our own endeavours. We won't get very far going it alone, taking all the credit or by continually telling people what's wrong, where they are falling down, what could be done better. It is always better to start with acknowledging the contribution and labours of others rather than being inclined to take credit for their work. Acknowledging the positive, what is going well, what others are doing is essential. Underlying Jesus' instruction is a reminder to ask ourselves where and how we work to enrich the

lives of those around us? Do we praise, thank and encourage? Are we positive influences? Surely that is the message of the Gospel – not just hearing the Good News but being good news?

When we become alert to the efforts of those around us and how much we are indebted to them, then we can begin to understand how much in our own lives depends on God and how much on ourselves? In practice, most of us focus on what we have to do rather than what God has and is already doing. But even then, we can have preconceived ideas about what God ought to be doing and where God ought to be working, where God ought to be showing Godself. But most often we find God at work in the ordinary, right under our noses, in the contributions of others, in the work of others as they use their gifts and talents which God has given them. They too are using them in the service of God.

We seem to have lost the sense that all the world is sacred and that what we do is part of the continuing work of God's creation. That may be because the world seems so full of sadness and misery, the nightly news so filled with horror stories. Finding God's presence in all that seems impossible. All the more reason to go looking, all the more reason to find ways to seek out God's presence and purpose in what we are creating and in those we are working with. Is it true that we don't seem to bless our workplaces or our workbenches, our offices or factories or even our homes anymore? Do we start our journeys, our days, our endeavours with a prayer, silent or shared? Such prayers not only seek God's protection but they alert us to God's presence in our work and that of others. Prayer reminds us to give thanks to God and to our co-workers. When we do not link our everyday activities to God's care, when we under-appreciate the sacredness of what we and others do, those activities soon become flat and ordinary and we unconsciously compensate for that by rewarding ourselves and criticising others.

Regards
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