

Readings:

Hebrews 3: 1-5 & 10

Mark 1: 14-20

Sermon “Called up for, and by, Christ”

Called up

Well I wonder what immediately comes into your minds when I use the term: “Called up”? It is a phrase which has a variety of meanings, such as, ringing someone on the phone, retrieving information on a computer; asking someone to step forward, perhaps onto a platform to speak or address the crowd; and to promote somebody, such as in the world of work or even to a higher level of playing sport, especially those called up from club sport to represent their country on the international stage.

There are many other meanings, but perhaps today, on Remembrance Sunday, and in this, the church’s season of All Saints and All Souls, to be ‘called up’ has two major connotations.

Firstly, those who were called up to military service, particularly conscription, which has happened twice in this country, between 1916 and 1920, and then between 1939 and 1960. Numbers vary but it is well over 5 million men who were called up in these two time periods. These men were called up to do something, in this case fight - in order to safeguard future freedoms of our country.

Secondly, to be ‘called up’, is a deliberate act of remembrance. At All Souls we call up into our minds and voices the names of people who hold a special meaning in our lives. And today and tomorrow, the nation calls up those who have given their lives to defend us in times gone.

Long may the traditions of All Souls and Remembrance Sunday continue.

Called to follow

Before 1916 the British Army had been a, relatively small, but highly professional outfit. It had had an incredible amount of success in military terms when we look back at conflict over the centuries. Soldiers were well disciplined, well trained and performed to high standards when it came to what they were trying to achieve: such as winning battles. Contrary to popular opinion, recruiting didn't involve simply grabbing people from the nearest village and dressing them in a uniform. So being called up in conscription, was new, risky, but a necessary policy.

But God uses different tactics. In the ordinariness of daily work, Simon, Andrew, James, and John encountered Jesus. As far as we know they weren't looking for a new adventure, and they weren't press-ganged into following him. They weren't looking to join a military campaign to take on the Roman legions.

And neither was Jesus looking to recruit soldiers – at this not in this sense. He wanted to call up people who would help proclaim the good news about God.

But if Jesus were looking for followers who would be immersed in the religious scriptures and traditions, and who were well polished in preaching and proclamation, then he wouldn't be looking for fishermen. His recruiting ground would have been amongst the well-respected, and high status-ed religious professionals, not down at the docks. And yet this is where we find him.

The reality is that Christ calls each one of us, and has no specific criteria as to what qualifies us. *So many* people in our churches, and in our society, still believe that being called up by Christ, only applies to people with special roles, or with enough resources of compassion and energy, or special gifting. But in calling four, down to earth, rough around the edges, fisherman, Jesus makes it clear that the Kingdom of God really is for whoever will answer “Yes” when he calls them.

Called to remember

One of the key jobs the disciples were called up to do was to be witnesses; witnesses to the things Jesus did and said. As he began his ministry, Jesus was knowingly entering into conflict – with culture, with the religious and political authorities and with that which lay in the spiritual realms.

So he called up people who would show commitment, attentiveness and courage. And they did remember – the Church was built on the foundation of, not just Jesus, but on the memories of Jesus, the custodians of which were the disciples.

And one of the main acts of remembrance is of course our Holy Communion. ‘Do this in remembrance of me.’ We take our place as custodians of these memories and traditions.

So *remembering* is part of our nature of Christians, as are important symbols which help us remember. And this of course seeps through into our national culture.

On this Remembrance Sunday we don’t just acknowledge those who have served our country in all wars and conflicts, but we listen to their memories, their stories and their warnings. Remembrance speaks into our future just as much as it does into our past.

‘The farther backward you can look, the farther forward you can see’ quipped Winston Churchill. As well as the importance of gaining insight and learning lessons from history this quotation encourages us to not get so stuck in the past that we end up neglecting the future.

In the same way, our Scriptures which are composed from the disciples’ memories and reflections, are not to remain as

memories, but to inspire us in our futures, to be witnesses to Jesus by showing commitment, attentiveness and courage.

Called to symbolise

Just as our sharing of Holy Communion should inspire us in our witnessing to Jesus through our lives of faith, the great symbol for our nation to remember, and to be inspired to live a better future is, of course the poppy.

This year we have been staggered by the sheer number of poppies knitted by people from our parish and beyond. Well over 5000 and a good few hundred from the hands of our beloved Janet Wilson, one the great disciples of Jesus in the chronicles of Shirely Parish! For Janet, whose faithful service shone brightly as a witness to Christ, she has now been “called up” in the sense that she now rests with the God she worshipped and loved; at peace, at rest, eagerly awaiting that great day of resurrection when Christ comes again, as our Hebrews reading reminds us.

So on this Remembrance Sunday, when we acknowledge all of those called up to military service on behalf of our country, let us also through our Holy Communion be reminded that we, like Janet, Simon, Andrew, James and John, and many others, have also been called up by Christ, to be witnesses to him. Amen.

Rev'd Richard Haynes 10 November 2024

3rd Sunday before Advent & Remembrance Sunday