

## Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> February - Calling

Isaiah 6.1-8 (9-end)

1 Corinthians 15.1-11

Luke 5.1-11

Yesterday at the Cathedral in Birmingham I was at the Readers Licensing Service. 12 new Readers were licensed in the Diocese, and more than 30 others had what's known as their permission to officiate renewed, meaning they are still recognised as being called to be lay ministers in their parishes. Sarah and Denise were two of these. Once a Reader passes a certain age they have their permission to officiate renewed every 3 years. But it gives them an opportunity to reassess their calling. Is this still what God is calling them to do? I am pleased to say that both Sarah and Denise recognise that they are still called by God to serve him in Shirley Parish, and the church recognises that too.

And on Thursday Richard Haynes and myself had to go into Birmingham, to the Diocesan office, for what's known as an assessment panel. Curates in the church of England are continually assessed over a whole host of areas, including their vocation or their calling. Is God still calling them to be ministers, to be priests in his church? And again I am pleased to say that Richard and those whose job it is to assess him recognise that God is still calling Richard to this ministry.

Calling – we often use that word to refer to someone being called to upfront, licensed ministry in the church – like clergy or Readers. But its not just about that. I believe that each one of us is called by God for something. Called to follow Jesus of course, but also for specific tasks as part of that following. Perhaps a simpler way of saying this is that God has in mind certain things for each of us to do as we serve him though the church and the community. We each have a role to play.

Today we have 3 Bible readings about calling.

First, from the Old Testament something of the story of the prophet Isaiah. He had a vision and saw the almighty God on the throne, in the holy of holies. He says *I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lofty; and the hem of his robe filled the temple.* Isaiah was filled with awe and wonder. He felt that he was unworthy to be in the presence of God. *Woe to me, I am a man of unclean lips.*

An angel came to him and symbolically cleansed him, touching him on the lips with a burning coal. Then God asked Isaiah a question. *Whom shall I send, and who will go for us* and Isaiah gave his response *Here am I; send me!* He recognised that God was calling him.

It was as if God had appeared specifically and purposefully to Isaiah and called him to this task of speaking God's message to the people.

Then we hear about the apostle Paul. In the reading he talks about what he has been called to do – to preach the gospel – and about his calling to be an apostle – someone with a particular calling to establish the church. We probably know the story of his calling as he met the risen Jesus on the road to Damascus and was called by God, given the task by God to preach the gospel to gentiles. And Paul, like Isaiah, was aware of his unworthiness. *For I am the least of all the apostles—I do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted God's church*

Our gospel is another familiar story – that of the calling of Simon Peter, James and John. Here they are in their boats after a night's fishing. After a dismal and fruitless night. Jesus asks Simon Peter to put the boat out from the shore, and then addresses the crowd from the boat. What did he teach them? We can only guess, but we can assume Simon and the others listened. When he had finished, he told the fishermen to go out and put their nets down for a catch. They caught the most amazing quantity of fish. Simon recognises Jesus is no ordinary mortal, and says *Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man*. I am unworthy to be near you.

Jesus calls him to follow and they all left everything to follow him. And as they followed they were each given specific roles – Simon Peter to be the Rock on which the church be built

A variety of people; a variety of situations but a definite theme.

God called Isaiah; Paul and Simon Peter to particular tasks. Each of them recognised that they were unworthy of that calling. But God used each one of them, despite their failings and weaknesses.

And so what about us. What about you?

The temptation is for us to say that we have little to offer; that there are others who God could use; that we are too old; we are not clever enough; we have no particular gifts or abilities; we are not up to the task.

There is a group of us in the parish who meet once a month to read the Bible and think about our faith and how we can best live it out. This week we were thinking, amongst other things, about the gifts each one of us have from God and how we might use those gifts. We knew that if we were asked what our gifts were we would all probably be quite reticent; we don't like to brag; we often don't see what others see – what God sees.

So we each had a blank piece of paper stuck on our backs and we were encouraged to write others gifts on their sheet of paper. Each one of us wrote something on everyone else's back. Then we looked at the paper on our own backs. I guess we were all both surprised and encouraged by what others had written – by what others see in us; by what God sees in us.

Isaiah, Paul and Simon Peter, despite their reservations, all responded to God's call.

I don't suppose God will call us or speak to us in a vision of him sitting on the throne in heaven; in a blinding light which stops us in our tracks as we go to Sainsburys or with an enormous catch of fish.

Maybe it will be the word of a friend; maybe a notice in the pewslip; perhaps a word in a sermon or just a kind of feeling. But we, like them, have to be ready and brave enough to take that step and respond to the call. We have to recognise that God probably knows us better than we do ourselves; that he knows what we really are capable of and that he would never ask us to do something beyond our capabilities. It won't be preaching the gospel to a rebellious people; it won't be to be an apostle to the gentiles or to become a fisher of men.

He might be asking us to help with Jimmy Tots, to write something for the magazine about our experience of God's love and faithfulness; to take a more active role in practical things at church – it could be almost anything.

That's the sort of thing what those 12 new Readers have recognised; that's what Sarah and Denise recognised again; that's what has brought Richard, Rich and myself to where we are today. Recognising that if God is asking us to do something, all we can respond with is Here am I, send me.

It's up to us to listen for that call and to take a step in responding, trusting that God will help us and equip us for the task ahead.