

## Sermon for Sunday 9 February 2025

**Isaiah 6: 1 – 8; 1 Corinthians 15: 1 – 11; Luke 5: 1 – 11**

### Vocation

“Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory”

This is what the seraphim are calling to one another in Isaiah’s vision in our first reading today. All of our readings today are on the subject of vocation. And each of them describes an encounter with God – that is God the Father or Jesus. A vocation is something that we are called or invited into by God – and, as baptised Christians, we are all called to something!

Let’s begin with Isaiah- p 645 on Pew Bibles. This is the moment that Isaiah receives his call from God to be a prophet. It begins with a vision of God seated on a throne. It’s so vivid and so memorable that Isaiah knows exactly when it happened ‘In the year that King Uzziah died’. Around 760 BC. Mysterious angelic figures are flying around calling out to one another “Holy,

holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory”. There’s shaking and smoke. The holy presence is terrifying. Isaiah becomes acutely aware not only of his own sinfulness, but of the sin of the whole nation in which he lives. How can someone so unclean look upon God? But one of the seraphs takes a burning coal and purifies his lips – ouch! And then Isaiah hears God asking who He can send. And he volunteers ‘Here am I. Send me.’

Fast forward some 800 years, and Paul has an equally dramatic encounter on the Damascus road. This time with the resurrected Jesus. Those of us who were on the Alpha course yesterday may remember that Paul’s conversion featured in one of the videos we watched. It’s recorded in Acts Chapter 9. (Acts 9: 1- 9). This is what he’s referring to in his letter to the Corinthians. This is why he calls himself ‘someone untimely born’ (1 Cor 15: 8). Like Isaiah, the encounter with Jesus makes Paul aware of his own sinfulness, particularly because he persecuted the church. He too is aware that it is by the grace of God that

he has been forgiven, transformed and given his new calling to preach the Gospel.

Our Gospel passage in Luke is at first sight a very different account of calling. We're in the solid everyday world here. Jesus is beside a lake. He gets in to a vacant boat after the fishermen have come to land. While they're washing their nets He uses it as a pulpit. The sound would travel well across the water to the crowds on the shore. When he's finished speaking, Jesus tells Simon to go fishing again, although it's the wrong time of day. Although Simon knows a lot more about fishing than Jesus does, there's something about Jesus' authority which makes Simon obey. And then the miraculous catch. So many fish that they need help. Simon's response is not unlike Isaiah's 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am sinful man' (Luke 5:8). But what follows is Jesus' commission to Simon and his business partners. They are to fish for people from now on. This catch will be miraculous too.

So – three stories of calling with a lot in common.

Isaiah, Paul and Simon, in different ways, all encounter the glory and holiness of God. All realise their own sinfulness and inadequacy. Each receives a particular commission. Each is assured that the presence and the grace of God will be with them. They will not be alone.

God's calling isn't just for prophets and apostles. Nor is it just for younger people. It's for all of us – whatever age and stage we're at. When we're baptised, symbolically we die and rise with Jesus in order to live for Jesus. At the end of the baptism service we give the newly baptised and candle – and tell them to shine as lights in the world to the glory of God the Father. This can be a risky business - as it certainly was for Isaiah, Paul and Simon. It involves being prepared to open ourselves to the Holy Spirit and possibly to go into some dark places. How else could we shine? Rowan Williams<sup>1</sup> says we're all called to be prophets, priests and kings. In other words to challenge one another to live out our faith, to be reconcilers and to fight for justice. But we're not

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<sup>1</sup> Rowan Williams, *Being Christian*, on Baptism

all to be the same. There's something for each of us to do which is uniquely suited to who we are and where God has placed us.

The theologian Frederick Buechner puts it in a more down to earth way. Here's a way he suggests of beginning to find out what God is calling you to do:

"The kind of work God usually calls you to is the kind of work (a) that you need most to do and (b) that the world most needs to have done. If you really get a kick out of your work, you've presumably met requirement (a), but if your work is writing TV deodorant commercials, the chances are you've missed requirement (b). On the other hand, if your work is being a doctor in a leper colony, you have probably met requirement (b), but if most of the time you're bored and depressed by it, the chances are you have not only bypassed (a) but probably aren't helping your patients much either.

Neither the hair shirt nor the soft berth will do. The place God calls you to is the place where your

deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet."<sup>2</sup>

In other words, vocation is something that we want to do in the depths of our being. It's about who we are. And it's also something that God really wants done too. It can take time and courage to find it. And it comes first out of our encounter with God, out of worship.

To paraphrase the poet Mary Oliver – What is God asking you to do with your one wild precious life?

"Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory"

Amen

\*(Previously preached Sunday 10 February 2019 – here slightly adapted)

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<sup>2</sup> Originally published in *Wishful Thinking*