

“Welcome to the throne room of the Creator.” My Mum welcoming in visitors to St Alban’s. Some smile; others charmed into conversation: many think she’s bonkers!!

She is an Isaiah seeing God’s robe – and his train fills the temple.

The vision is sweeping; magisterial, grand. Smoke hangs in the air and there are strange creatures. And in that breath taking, awe-inspiring space; you’d expect the resonant tone of Marlon Brando, Morgan Freeman, Albert Finney with an imperious, commanding tone to speak – or rather – to give an order. Instead, we have a plea / a request – “Who will go for me?”

It is a cry for help – some would say – “it’s a calling.”

Isaiah’s vision takes place in the temple during worship. God sits on a throne, high and lofty as the seraphim sing his praise – “Holy, holy holy is the Lord God Almighty – who was, and is and is to come.” The whole place reverberates with this sound and Isaiah can barely stand. He feels utterly unworthy. His life is in danger. “I am lost” he says – akin to - “I am silenced – I don’t know what to say”

“I am a man of unclean lips” – and the seraph cleanses his lips – notice how it takes a seraph tongs to get the live coal – and yet Isaiah is unprotected – suggesting perhaps that healing doesn’t necessarily come easy

“I live among a people of unclean lips” – Judgement falls upon the community of God and the prophet is the bearer of that news. So the prophet is the first to feel it.

Because of what Isaiah sees – he confesses with his lips. His mouth is cleansed and he is able to hear the word of God and take it to heart. God’s mission involves hearing, sight, heart, eyes and ears. Nothing is left untouched.

God has something he needs help with – He needs to commission a messenger and asks: “Whom shall I send?” “Who will go for us?”

And without even knowing it – Isaiah responds – “Here I am; send me!”

Maybe it comes from the euphoria of forgiveness or healing. Maybe it is because he is impetuous. Perhaps because it is divinely-willed. Or may be – when you encounter the majesty and mercy of God you are compelled to humility and honesty – willing to do anything in service.

This motif of call runs through all our readings today. And perhaps a helpful distinction is between a general calling to live a life of faith and obedience and a specific call to serve God in a particular way or task – to a vocation within wider society.

Isaiah is essentially called to go and minister to a God-less people. In our Gospel reading Jesus summons the first disciples to follow him as Leader and Saviour and to the specific task of evangelism.

There is a symmetry between the 2 scenes

- A readiness and sensitivity to hear the authoritative challenge whether during worship or work
- A realisation of a deep sense of unworthiness
- But that such a feeling does not disqualify from service – but is almost the necessary first step to humble, dependent discipleship reflected in a willingness to go where God leads

The same dynamic is evident in the epistle. Paul is talking about the world-transforming knowledge of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Like Isaiah and Peter he knows that he has not been given the job because he is the best person for it

Knowing you can't do it almost seems like the best qualification on God's checklist for applicants!!

The 3 readings today are a tiny ripple of the tidal wave of creative power we see in the resurrection. God creates through sheer exuberant power, and wills its transformation with an intense love – and if you don't believe that by his Spirit this sheer creative power is at work among us now – then as Paul says- “you have come to believe in vain”

God in Jesus chooses to come and live as one of us to redeem us. He gives his Son to us and all creation. Isaiah, Peter, Paul and even Jemima don't bother to talk about terms and conditions, perks and benefits, competencies or outcomes. They see God and are grateful to be allowed into his throne room; into his service; to do his work. We might look at them all and say “Wow – if only God calls us like he did in visions long ago, or on the seashore or Damascus road!” I wonder what Isaiah, Peter and Paul might look with envy instead at us and what we have seen of God's power at work in 2 millenia and wonder at our lack of faith!

We live in a time of unrest in Church and society. And there are expectations projected onto Christians from every direction - not all of them great and certainly not all of them realistic or sustainable!

So what, amongst all the 'stuff' that will come your way, should be your priority and the firm ground upon which you walk? In church or society where resources are rationalised; boundaries shift; and aspects of church life face possible remodelling?

The questions, 'What IS the Church?' and 'What is St Alban's FOR?' “WHO is it for?” And this is a question we have to examine and re-examine - again and again - possibly with growing urgency.

I hope that as this happens the Church will not neglect to look deep within its own archive of long and wide experience at those who have lived aboard and have steered this ship of faith through stormy days at many times and in many places:

people who have had to rediscover - to excavate and to return to the firm foundations of the Gospel, to the person of Jesus Christ Himself, whom they have had to find again beneath centuries of projection onto Him and the accretion which comes from power and privilege. And to re-discover the radical and challenging nature of His self-giving love.

The whole point of God demonstrating to us in an ultimate way His profoundly self-giving love, in the person of Jesus: the whole point of the incarnation, the life and ministry, the death and resurrection of Jesus, is to lead us into - and to open a way into - nothing less than a partaking of the Divine Life itself. An astonishing thing! And, as will happen today, we are given the Holy Spirit as a pledge of that sharing in the life and activity of God Himself. That is what we are each called to – lay people and clergy alike.

That, is our calling. – Every one of us. God calls you each by name. Your Maker knows you inside out. You have been called precisely because YOU are YOU!

My friends, your personal integrity; your life of prayer; your time spent with God; your engagement with the Scriptures and with the rich legacy of the worldwide Church - treasures from the past and riches held by other traditions and by Christians rooted in other cultures and histories; the nurturing of your own spirituality; your insistence that you can not go it alone ... things such as these must enliven you if you are to be salt for others.

Our God is a Creator God who constantly brings new things into being.

I hear Tom Thumb and Thumbelina – alias Isaiah and Jemima challenge our behaviours today. They say: “Hello – Welcome to the throne room of the Creator These pocket rockets - hidden in the hem of God’s garment – compelled to speak with boldness to God’s people.

We spend a lot of time in churches on what happens on Sundays. We want it to be awesome. And dynamic. And “real.” We want the music to come together. Perhaps we want to capture the grandeur of God. Or, perhaps we want to be just so. Or even just as they were when we first came to this church.

But, whatever we do, and however we do it, what we absolutely cannot afford to do is drown out the voice of God calling His People into action.

Nor can we drown out the one who is inspired to answer the call, no matter how faint their voice.

Because, when we take away the lights, the stained glass and ornate fabrics, organ pipes, and silver chalices...really it’s the hem of God’s robe which fills St Alban’s.

And when we take a moment of silence, it’s God’s voice which asks us to go for Him. Let’s hear that voice, and let us go – wherever he may lead. Amen