

“ WE HAVE FOUND

the Messiah.”

JOHN 1:41



15th January 2023

2nd Sunday after Epiphany

Greetings my brothers & sisters in Christ, what a joy it is to be here, as we come together to worship and celebrate the 2nd Sunday after Epiphany. I pray, that today's message will continue to lift all our spirits in 2023, as we journey together, and encourage us, as we live out our lives as Christians, servants of Christ our King, committed to lives of service, in His Kingdom!

Let us pray.

Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love. Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Our Psalm & three readings for today have a common thread of the call to us all to be active participants in God's calling.

As I prepared today's message, some of the material that came to hand on the Old Testament prophets, mentioned the daunting challenges they faced. When you think about it, to be called by God is a thing of joy and maybe terror, one could say in possibly equal measures. For example, in our first reading, Isaiah speaks of his calling as something about which he had no choice, and like Jeremiah, this prophet cannot remember a time when he was unaware that he had been called by God, and that calling was the foundation of his whole being. Not that it was necessarily obvious to others. Indeed, Isaiah specifically says God hides him away, at least for a while. Note he doesn't say why, perhaps he didn't know. Another recurrent theme in the lives of those called by God is learning to live with both knowledge and ignorance. They are shown into the workings of God's plan just as far as they need to be to fulfil their task and no further.

They can never deceive themselves **that they are co-designers of the plan.** They simply announce what they have been told.

To us "modern sophisticated humankind" there is obviously some frustration involved in this annoying way of working, due to the observation that the prophet – and any other servant of God – and that includes us, don't know all the details of how things should be going, and it is quite possible to tell whether or not they or we are succeeding in their or our task. Most of the time, they are sure that they can't be, because there are no visible results at all. Are we like that also? But just as the prophet turns to God and says, **"I'm really sorry, I did my best, but I've failed. You know how hard I tried. I'm very sorry"**, and at this point of despair, God suddenly reveals that the task is much bigger than the prophet ever dreamed. Have we ever experienced that response? In this reading, he thought he was being sent to his own people, Israel, but God says to him, **'Not just Israel, but the world'.**

Again, in our "modern sophisticated world" would we possibly comment that it doesn't seem the best possible management practice to tell an employee who is already discouraged that actually their job is

going to get much harder! But it is thanks to the prophet, and many others before and after him, who begin to glimpse the enormity of God's wonderful salvation that the Corinthians - and we - are part of the story at all.

We have the Corinthians, who are largely experiencing the present excitement in their journey of discipleship that will certainly lead them to sympathise, at times, with the prophet Isaiah. The Corinthians are not yet aware that God's personnel practices are strange, and that knowing your weakness, (we call it vulnerability in Kairos), is often the qualification that God chiefly looks for in his followers. Paul is going to do his best to tell them. Paul starts cautiously, with well-judged praise. But even that is laced with phrases that should make the Corinthians pause. Paul tells them that they are called to be saints - but so are thousands of others who call on the name of Jesus. The Corinthians might have thought that they were special, but they are not!

Anyone who calls on the name of Jesus is the equal of the sophisticated and intellectual Corinthian believers. Paul acknowledges that they are, indeed, a very impressive bunch! They are doing brilliantly in their public witness, at least when it involves exciting speeches.

Is there a hint that their lives are perhaps not quite such good missionary material? The whole of the correspondence between Paul and the Corinthian church suggests that these are joyful, confident Christians, who are slightly inclined to put their trust in themselves and in the outward signs of Christian power, rather than in God, or in each other. One of the big changes between the prophet who speaks in Isaiah and the Corinthian Christians is the number of people who share in God's calling. The prophet experiences loneliness and misunderstanding, and his task is often a solitary one. But we Christians are called to be witnesses together, (***There are no Lone Rangers in Christian Community***) and to learn from each other as well as from God. The thing we are most apt to underrate or even despise - the Church - is the thing that the prophets would most have envied.

So the first thing we see Jesus doing, as he emerges from the waters of baptism, is calling a group of people together. They have no idea how much they are to go through together, and how much they will need each other, or how much they will accomplish, and how much their names will be revered down the centuries. John the Baptist affirms that Jesus lives and moves in the power of God. And Jesus, the beloved son, feeling the presence of the Holy Spirit, instantly begins to build a community that will be able to hold that knowledge for the world, and share it. Like Jesus, and thanks be to Jesus, we too are blessed Children of God, full of the Holy Spirit, and we are called to share God's love with the world. The gospel reading brings up the subject of discipleship & what makes a person a follower of Christ?

So, what does discipleship involve?

In the gospel account two of the disciples of John the Baptist 'followed' Jesus. This, of course, means much more than that they just trailed along after him as he walked. It means that, first of all they recognised him as someone special: they accepted him as what the Baptist declared him to be, ***"the lamb of God"***. The basis of their reaction to Jesus when they first encountered him was an ***"act of faith"***. Having accepted him as having this special role in God's plan of salvation for the Jews they went a step further. They decided to throw in their lot with him, to join his mission, and ***to become his disciples and followers***. Briefly stated, it means that they agreed to let him be the influence in their lives that God wanted him to be.

We could imagine Andrew & his brother Simon Peter thinking:

- ***'He is calling us, and we will answer that call'***.
- ***'He is calling us to be something with him, and we will be, and do, whatever he asks of us'***.
- ***And that decision determined the course of their lives and activities, and as we know, our lives!***

We Christians goes through that same process. First, we make this act of faith in Christ, acknowledging that he is sent by God to reveal God to us and humankind. And that we decide that we will submit ourselves to Christ and obey. As Christians, we are called people, living our whole lives as responding people to God's call through Jesus, guided by the Holy Spirit.

Amen.