

## Epiphany 2 John 1:29-42

This morning's readings are all about call, the call Isaiah prophesied that we have come to understand to refer to Jesus, the call of new Christians in Corinth acknowledged by St Paul and the call to ministry of the earliest disciples of Jesus in response to the testimony of John the Baptist.

"Call" or vocation is a term regularly used in the Church and can be impossible to articulate. Those who feel called know and are convinced of their calling in many and various ways, but in common they have a deeply held conviction that what they are doing is right. They come to realise their calling through reading scripture, through prayer and conversations with other people, particularly other prayerful people, open to the promptings of the spirit.

Hearing the words of the scripture readings this morning may give some of us cause to pause and reflect on our own understanding and experience of call. It is not unusual to hear through scripture, sometimes, the things we need to hear, which is why we must never stop reading, hearing and trying to understand the bible, because even when we think we get something straight in our minds, our circumstances and experiences can change and cause our understanding to shift too. We need always to approach the bible with an open mind.

We also need to accept that God can call us to specific ministry through scripture, as we hear a passage afresh we can come to a clear understanding of God's plan for us. Call can also come through encounters with other people, and often when we least expect it. Life would be so much easier if God communicated with us by sending messages in neon lights that we couldn't miss, or a letter in triplicate that we could read and re-read until we were sure of what he wanted of us. But unfortunately it doesn't work like that. Call comes through gradual confidence in what we hear through prayer and reflection, sometimes with moments of clarity and a little "eureka!" in the midst of things. But for most of us it is a lifetime journey to truly perceive what God's plan for us will look like.

Yet this journey has to begin somewhere, there must be a moment when we recognise that we are open to God's call, when we begin to listen, when we make some commitment to acknowledge that God moves in our lives and has a purpose for us. When we think of a call to ordained ministry we may think it's easy for them, the clergy, they get a sense of call to be ministers and that's when it all happens, but it's different from the rest of us. But that is simply not so.

When Pope Francis, early in his papacy, was asked by journalists what the most important day of his life had been, he didn't site his election as pope, or his consecration as bishop, he didn't even mention his ordination to the priesthood, rather he said, without hesitation, the day of his baptism, because that was the day he was made one with Christ. Everything else that has happened to Pope Francis has flowed out of the waters of baptism.

So it is with us, at the time of our baptism our journey with Christ began, not that he didn't know us before, rather that we, through our own choice or the action of parents and godparents, acknowledged that he was there, already loving us, and we opened the possibility of hearing the call he would make to us, the challenge he would issue to us. As Isaiah reminds us, the Lord called me from before I was born, he named me from my mother's womb.

And so it was with Jesus, from his baptism, he began to fulfil the call issued to him from the father. At his moment of baptism, just like ours, he and God came together and as Jesus began to do God's work so he began to draw attention to himself. One by one people wanted to listen to him, then to talk to him, then to know him better and today's gospel gives us a glimpse of how life changing an encounter with Jesus could be. Some people found Jesus on their own, others told relatives and friends and drew them to Jesus also. Those who followed him were far from perfect, we hear of Jesus renaming Simon as Peter, the rock, and we know that Peter was the most likely candidate of all the disciples to speak foolishly, and lose his temper and generally put his foot firmly in his mouth.

All of these things speak of hope to us, hope that by our baptism we have been made one with Christ and hear and receive his word through our prayers and encounters. Hope that we have been called to play our part in the bringing about of God's kingdom, through many and varied callings of prayer, study, hospitality, kindness, friendship and steadfast faith amongst so many others. And hope that we too are acceptable to God, just as Jesus' far from perfect disciples were wholly acceptable to God just as they were, so we hope that despite our mistakes and failings, we can see something of what God sees in us and in each other, the part of ourselves which is in his image, and use it in pursuit of his kingdom in this place and at this time.

Amen.