



Season of Lay Ministries

First Sunday of Epiphany

8 January

Giving Service to God

Readings

Isaiah 42:1-9
Psalm 29:1
Acts 10:34-43
Matthew 3:13-17

Vocation is about a strong feeling of a call or a calling in people's lives - but whose call and in whose lives? Many of us probably question whether we are good enough to serve God and the church and yet God calls us knowing our imperfections. Peter, in his Second Letter to the Corinthians wrote, 'what sort of persons ought you to be in leading lives of holiness and godliness, waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God' (Peter 3:11) - a high expectation of those who consider or enter God's service in any form. We question whether we are good enough and yet God calls us knowing our imperfections. In John's Gospel Jesus said, 'You did not choose me but I chose you' (John 15:16).

Today's readings share the theme of giving service to God and following the example of Jesus, the Servant King. Here there appears to be a fusion of the Old Testament reading from Isaiah, 'Here is my servant, whom I uphold' (Isaiah 42:1), and the New Testament reading from Matthew, 'This is my Son, the Beloved, with whom I am well pleased' (Matthew 3:17). The voice of God from heaven announces that the true Son, the Messiah had arrived, a divine example of service that we can follow. Christ's mission on earth was to demonstrate God's righteousness and to be light to the Gentiles, to all nations. Through Christ we have the opportunity to share in his mission.

In Acts 10 God tells Peter to take the Good News to a Roman and Peter obedient to God. Peter had to listen to God, be open to God and trust God who was making it clear that the Good News of Christ is for everyone. 'God shows no partiality...You know the message he sent to the people of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus

Christ - he is Lord of all' (Acts 10:34,36). Ours is an inclusive God who is proud of the talents, richness and diversity of His people.

In our Gospel reading Matthew describes Jesus' baptism by John as a fulfilment of Isaiah preparing the way of the Lord (Isaiah 40:3). Jesus and John meet face to face in an unexpected way, and John didn't expect what he was about to be asked. John is called to baptise Jesus but felt unworthy to do this. Surely, he was the servant and he wanted Jesus to baptise him? John proclaimed a baptism of repentance and those being baptised confessed their sins. Jesus had nothing to repent but took responsibility for the sins of the world. He gives John authority to baptise him to show his support for what John was doing. He was also inaugurating his public ministry and identifying with the penitent people of God, not with the critical Pharisees. As Jesus emerges from the water, he sees the heavens open and the Holy Spirit descends to rest on him in a dove-like form. The voice of God the Father declares that Jesus is his Son and that he is pleased with him. Jesus' ministry is both confirmed and revealed on earth. Jesus is starting his public ministry and we are called to do the same.

In baptism we are given gifts to serve God in ministry and spreading the Good News is something that the whole church shares in. Paul in his Letter to the Ephesians lists the roles of those who help the church to grow - the apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers (Ephesians 4:11). When it comes to serving God and one another, we are all called and we all have our parts to play. During this Season of Lay Ministries we are encouraged to consider ministry, perhaps as a Reader, a SPA (Southwark Pastoral Auxiliary) or Lay Pioneer. The newest form of Diocesan ministry Affirmed ministry which recognises and affirms the contribution of church members in their roles. It would be surprising if there wasn't someone in our congregation who, at some point, might be called to one of these lay ministries - or to take on a new role in the church or community. We know that this takes time and energy, and when

we give of ourselves in the service of others it's important to be doing the right thing. To discuss your calling; talk to your incumbent; attend a Vocations Fair to find out more about the different ministries; and pray for God's guidance.

Lay ministry is well summarised in Thomas O'Meara's definition in his book *The Theology of Ministry*. He writes, ministry is (1) doing something; (2) for the advent of the kingdom; and (3) which is a gift received in faith and baptism. At the moment that Jesus was baptised significant events occurred. Heaven was opened, God's spirit descended on Jesus and God's voice was heard. Like Jesus, through baptism we have been equipped for ministry. Isaiah said, 'I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I; send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). Isaiah was ready to do God's work - are we?

*Michael Brockett
Southwark Pastoral Auxiliary (SPA)
and Interim Diocesan Lay Ministry Advisor*

Prayer

God, as you call us into ministry
give us the confidence to respond to your call,
to testify to you in word and deed
and bring our whole selves to you
in obedient love;
for Jesus' sake.
Amen.

Suggested hymns

I the Lord of sea and sky
On Jordan's bank
God in man made manifest
The Servant King: Graham Kendrick
A New Commandment
Be Still and Know that I am God
For the Healing of the Nations
God is Working His Purpose Out
Lord for the Years
Amazing Grace