



The Diocese of
Southwark

Season of Lay Ministries

Fourth Sunday of Epiphany

29 January

The Wedding at Cana and hearing the call

Readings

1 Cor 1:18-31, John 2:1-11, 1 Kings 17:8-16,
Ps 36:5-10

As we come to the end of Epiphany and our Season of Lay Ministry here in Southwark Diocese it's helpful that two of our readings for today prompt us to think about our calling. This season has mainly been asking those of us who are lay, what it is that we are called to do for God's people and the mission of the church in the places where we find ourselves living and working? In our New Testament reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians we even find the phrase "consider your own call, brothers and sisters" - given as an instruction. Meanwhile, in today's Gospel reading the Wedding at Cana - which must be one of the most familiar bible stories - I also see an encouragement for each of us to think about what God is asking us to do today. We are all called to carry out God's mission in the church and especially in the wider world - the challenge is often in hearing and working out our response to that call.

Of course, all Gospel stories speak to us, and challenge us - and the Wedding at Cana is especially packed with meaning so there's lots to explore. But quite often with bible stories - and especially with the miracles - we can find ourselves asking "so how did this happen", or "what really went on" and it's easy to get side-tracked looking for a scientific or practical explanation for what we read - perhaps Jesus simply knew where more wine was kept, or he was able to pop out to the ancient middle eastern equivalent of the local off-licence. However, "how did this happen" is not the right question. The question we should really ask are "What does this mean to me in my life today?" Followed by the critical question, "and how should I respond?"

I like today's Gospel story for the pictures it paints

of the two main people involved. Firstly, there's the image it gives us of Mary. Over the last month especially, we've explored the Christmas story and have been reminded of Mary's obedience to a calling, of her following the call to be the mother of Jesus with all the difficulties and consequences that would follow. In today's Gospel though, we have seen a different picture, this is not the passive, maybe even a somewhat submissive, woman we see in the Christmas story who has things happen to her. Today's picture of an active Mary, someone who saw that something needed sorting out, knew who could help solve a crisis and made it happen. Mary wasn't just letting events happen around her, maybe she was even acting out of character to get Jesus to act to save the family from the shame of running out of wine at a wedding. And, let's be honest, we all need that sort of prompt or encouragement every so often to remind us that we should be getting on with something that matters.

The second image I get from this story is the picture it gives us of Jesus being there at the centre of an important community event. Now, it's easy to trivialise this story and say that, as Jesus liked a good party and glass of wine, we have every reason to do the same. This may be fine, but much more importantly, what this story tells me is that Jesus was being part of what is going on in the real world. He was part of people's lives in the everyday and the commonplace. As we so often see Jesus, he was out with people, right there at the centre of events, ministering to those out in the wider world. And I think both of these images are particularly pertinent as we conclude this Season of Lay Ministry. The image of someone being particularly proactive, even if it may be out of character, and that of ministering out in the community, serving others. Both of which prompt us to ask ourselves "so what might God be calling me to do and what should I be doing about it?"

Now it may be that you are thinking, well that's all ok for Mary, she had an angel to help her understand

her calling - and well, Jesus is Jesus so he knew what he was supposed to be doing! Also, like me as I was being encouraged to consider Reader ministry, you could be thinking "I'm not sure I'm really up to the task of ministry".

All of which brings me back to our New Testament reading from Paul's letter to the Corinthians. In encouraging his readers to consider their call, he goes on to tell them that not many of them were wise, or powerful or of noble birth. He reminds them that God chose what is foolish, what is weak, what is low and even despised in the world. So, it seems that feeling we're not really up to lay ministry may not be a good enough excuse - all are called, the challenge for each of us is to work out what ministry God is calling us to.

Of course, each person's response will not be identical but we do all have skills and talents we could be using in the service of others. And there are a wide range of ministries including as an evangelist, a lay pioneer or working with children, youth and families. Remember too, that there is training and support from the Diocese for all types of ministry. So, my suggestion today is that we shouldn't always wait to be asked - or indeed to be told by our mothers - before offering those skills in service and as a response to God's call to each of us.

I would encourage you to take some time out over the next few days and weeks to give some thought this week to your ministry, the ministry to which God might be calling you. Take time to pray and listen to God about your own ministry. Talk to people who know you well, and perhaps to some who don't know you at all - even if you have to act out of character to do so.

The transformation of water into wine is meant to signify the effect Jesus had, and can still have, on people's lives. On that day, he saved a family from social disgrace. Today lay ministries also transform people's lives by bringing others to understand the love of God and the impact this will have on their lives. The challenge for each of us is to work out how we are being called to carry out God's mission, both in the church and the wider world, and then to act on that knowledge.

Amen

Jackie Pontin
Deputy Diocesan Secretary and Reader

Prayer

God of overflowing,
ceaseless,
extravagant love,
fill us with your grace
that as we respond to your call
and do what you tell us
what is lacking in us
might be transformed
by all that you give.

Amen

Suggested hymns

Just as I am, without one plea - Charlotte Elliott
Lord I come to you - Geoff Bullock
All my hopes on God is founded - Robert Bridges
Brother, sister let me serve you - Richard Gillard
Lord the Light of your love - Graham Kendrick