



The Diocese of
Southwark

Season of Lay Ministries

First Sunday of Epiphany

7 January 2024

Giving service to God

Readings

Genesis 1:1-5
Psalm 29
Acts 19:1-7
Mark 1:4-11

Each person is called by God, and it is this call which we often refer to as a 'vocation.'

Be now thus says the Lord
He who created you, O Jacob,
He who formed you, O Israel:
Do not fear, for I have redeemed you:
I have called you by name, you are mine:

Isaiah 43:1

God calls each of us by name and the heart of responding to our vocation is to be the unique person calls us to be.

Calling, or vocation, is one of the major themes in the Bible. Scripture is full of inspiring stories of very ordinary people who achieved extraordinary things when answering God's call and putting it into action. Each and every one of us forms a unique part of God's loving creation and as such, each of us has a particular calling to fulfil in God's kingdom plan.

In Genesis Chapter 1 the opening words of the Bible help us to think of new beginnings. In Acts Paul baptises a group of believers in the name of the Lord Jesus, and they receive the Holy Spirit.

We have just heard in Mark's Gospel a short version of what happened when Jesus came to one of John's baptism sessions. We need Matthew and Luke to fill in the details. They show that the Baptist was pretty out-spoken in his message. When the Pharisees and Sadducees had joined the crowds at the riverside, he gave them "what for" according to Matthew's version. "You brood of vipers" he called. "Who warned you Walking | Welcoming | Growing

to flee from the wrath to come?." According to Luke the tax collectors were there too. But when Jesus turned up John was taken aback. He asked, "What are you doing here? I should be baptised by you." Jesus reassured him and stepped into the water. After the ceremony, many present heard God's voice from heaven, "You are my Son, the Beloved; with whom I am well pleased."

What a wonderful moment: the Father praising his Son. So the ministry of Jesus Christ began. Now the whole world, creator and created were brought to this one point. Father, Son, Holy Spirit, John the Baptist, everyone at the river brought together to launch Jesus on his course of ministry. A course which would take him travelling, healing, preaching, sharing joys, sharing sorrows. It would take him to his death, resurrection and ascension. From this beginning, we can learn three lessons. The first is the vision set by the Father. The second lesson is one of commitment - now Jesus is committed to his task, and there is a third lesson that we can all take from the baptism of Christ.

This is personal to each one of us, for we each have a journey to fulfil. We came from God and we will return to God. We each have a vocation. Yet vocation is often thought of as something special given to special people, people with particular gifts, like doctors, priests, teachers, artists, just to name a few. Yet God gave talents (gifts) to everyone, and we may not be in the best position to recognise our own vocation, for the call may come from God, or from his church and we might not always see it.

As we consider the baptism of Christ, let us then pick up the vision, make our commitment and follow our vocation. When it comes to serving God and one another, we are 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 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 is important to be doing the right thing. To discuss our calling talk to your spouse and family; your incumbent; attend a Vocation Fair to find out more about the different ministries; and pray for God's guidance.

At that moment when 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?

Cicelyn Hinds: Reader, St Mark, South Norwood

A prayer for the Season of Lay Ministries 2024

Written by Marie Williams, Southwark Pastoral Auxiliary (SPA), Holy Saviour, Croydon

Then 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 (NRSV)

Lord Jesus,
We give you thanks that
you consider us worthy to serve you
and have called us into ministries of many different kinds.

We pray for all those who are exploring what God's call means in their lives.

Help them to know God's peace and guiding as they listen for God's voice.

And we pray for those already in ministry that as they carry out your work you will help them to demonstrate your love,

your compassion and your truth
so that others may see your beauty and embrace you as Lord and Saviour

We ask this in the name of your Son Jesus Christ.

Amen.

Suggested prayer

Heavenly Father, who sent the Holy Spirit on your Son at his baptism to anoint him for the service of humankind: send your Spirit now to us who have been made children by adoption and grace, that we may follow in his steps and work for the coming of his Kingdom, to the glory of his name.

Amen.

Suggested hymns

Hail to the Lord's anointed
Now is eternal life
Thanks to God whose Word was spoken
The people that in darkness sat
On Jordan's bank the Baptist's cry
I bind unto myself today
How sweet the name of Jesus sounds
Christians, lift up your hearts
Christ when for us you were baptized
Seek ye first the kingdom of God