

Vocations Sunday

I've got to be honest, up to only a few years ago, I didn't know Vocations Sunday existed and yet it's there every year on the church calendar - 4th Sunday of Easter, Vocations Sunday. Vocation is one of those words which gets banded about a lot in church circles. But what is a vocation? Who has one and how do we know we've got it? What do we do when we've found it?



To begin, we're going to look at a short video. It's been produced by the Church of England for this year's Vocation Sunday - 'Called to Serve'

VIDEO

It's the story of just 3 people who felt God's call very powerfully in their lives. So powerfully that they quit work and trained to be ordained ministers. I'm pretty confident that that video will have spoken to some of you. God does, and I think is, calling people here in this direction. It's an exciting and amazing call, if not a little daunting. But is that all that Vocation is about?

According to the dictionary, Vocation is 'a strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation'. That's a pretty broad definition, way broader than that video would suggest. Way broader than a call to licensed ministry, whether lay or ordained. Vocation is about God's call into our life, to become who we were created to be. As Christians, we all share a call to be disciples of Jesus, to be God's church, to meet together, to worship God. As we heard in today's reading from Acts, this is a call which has been common to every Christian since the very beginning. But vocation is different. Our vocation is unique to each of us.

In my favourite psalm 139 we read, that God created our inmost being. All our days were written in God's book before we were even born. God knows each of us intimately. Each of us was created according to God's design. Each with a unique combination of God-given gifts, passions, potential, which God longs to use in bringing in his kingdom. God has a very particular purpose for our life. God's call extends to every one of us. That call is unique to us because we are unique.



Some of course are called to a ministry vocation within the Church, to lay or ordained ministry. But within the church our vocation might look very different. Maybe to other positions of leadership or responsibility. To join the PCC – hint hint! or maybe to roles using gifts of prayer, hospitality, music, children's work, pastoral care, DIY, gardening. The list is endless. But of course, not all vocations are within the church. Our vocation may lie in our workplace, our home, our neighbourhood. We may find our vocation in building community, raising children, caring for or serving others, kingdom-building where we live or work.

It can sometimes be hard to believe we have anything God could possibly use, but no matter who we are, whatever our circumstances, God has called us by name. Each part of the body is vital. God needs each of us, all that we are, in his kingdom-building plan.

So how does God call? How do we recognise our vocation? Well it comes down to shepherding. Vocations Sunday is also known as Good Shepherd Sunday. We've got a lot of shepherds and sheep in our service this morning, Psalm 23, several of our hymns and, of course, our Gospel reading, where Jesus continues his teaching about the Good shepherd. This lies at the heart of Christian vocation. We have a shepherd who knows each one of us intimately, who calls us uniquely by name, who leads us on our path of life.

That's all well and good, but how do we actually hear that call? Well for some lucky folk, God simply seems to place them where he wants them. I know people who've found their calling almost by accident. Sometimes God calls people in a very direct way, like Paul on the road to Damascus. But in my experience

it isn't always that simple. For many, God uses more subtle tactics! He may use our enthusiasms, our passions, our skills to lead us towards a particular role. He might use someone who recognises our gifts to 'nudge' us in the right direction or to sidle up to us! He may use **many** people, over weeks, months or even years, his repeated call increasingly hard to ignore. But God doesn't even need people. A particular scripture, a song lyric, a news headline, suddenly resonates or just keeps cropping up. Or we experience the stomach churning feeling we're 'where we're meant to be', even when we're completely out of our comfort zone.

God's call can take many forms, sometimes sudden, sometimes over many years, but always at the right time. And our vocation isn't set in stone. Our vocation can change, develop over the years. God called me to physiotherapy before ministry. Vocation it seems can have seasons, each call equipping us for the next.

So what does this all mean for us as individuals, as a church? How do we recognise and nurture God's call, in our own lives and in those around us? Well actually I think it's often easy to recognise gifts and potential in others, usually way before they do, and sharing that can be so vital. We might be the first person to

recognise and affirm a gift in prayer, in caring, in hospitality, in a hundred other things, or we might be the twenty-first, but we might just be the one who prompts that person to finally recognise and follow their call. But our responsibility doesn't end there. How much harder is it for us to recognise potential in ourselves? Yet this is what we are called to do, to be vigilant, listening, discerning where God is calling. Recognising and nurturing God's call in our own lives is an important part of discipleship.

We're called to follow Jesus wherever he may lead. It can be scary, but actually when we finally listen and follow, it can also bring huge blessing. When we live into God's plan for our lives, there's nothing like it. When we follow the shepherd, as Psalm 23

puts it, he refreshes our soul. And when we follow the Shepherd, when we step out in faith, no matter how steep the path, we can always be sure, that we do not walk alone.

'The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it'

Amen.

Revd Ros Wilshire

