

## THE CALL FROM GOD

Nic Denny-Dimitriou - 8th February 2004

Isaiah 6: 1-8, 1 Corinthians 15: 1-11, Luke 5: 1-11

Last Sunday - the launch of celebrating 100 years of Christian community in Hilton. 100 = a big number.

But for Julia and me, 2004 is the year we celebrate 116! (When I tell you how we work that out, many of you will say, "that's nothing ... we've got many more!")

Around the middle of this year 2004, Julia and I both turn 45 years old, celebrate 20 years of marriage, and our children Hannah & Joshua turn 3. (And yes, each of us has already had an incident where someone has turned to us and said, "Are these your grandchildren?" J )

Personal comments: (some know of our long wait to have children, and we mostly accepted we never could.) When Julia was pregnant, successfully, and from the 4th month had told the whole world, you can imagine the sense of excitement, and for us, the experience of God's miracle here! It was dramatic, deeply fulfilling, and healed a huge sense of loss we carried in all the previous childless years.

Yet... also scary! Before and after their birth. Massive adjustments, upsetting long-established and comfortable patterns of living and ways in which we related as a couple; change of rhythms of life, never mind desperation at the sleep deprivation. A major lifestyle change.

Would we have it any other way? No!

Not before it all happened, in anticipation; nor even now, being wiser and having experienced the change.

Today's readings: Something of that element.

Highlight major points from each one, and elaborate:

### **Old Testament Reading: God's call to Isaiah the prophet:**

- First reaction – stated how unworthy he was, a man of unclean lips (by implication, a man with an unclean heart).
- Further reaction – (elaborate from passage)

### **New Testament Reading: (the effect of) Jesus' call to Paul:**

- In this reading, Paul speaks firmly about the resurrection of Christ from the dead, and teaches on it. But he also goes on, in the light of that, to say how unworthy he is to be called "apostle", meaning, "one sent by God". He is the least of them!

- He is the man who had a wonderful ‘pedigree’ as a religious man, and who previously persecuted Christians, fervently believing himself to be doing the will of God – until he was confronted in the most personal way by God on the road to Damascus and acknowledged Christ to be Messiah. Immediate transformation – but several years of learning and growing in his newfound faith before then assuming the role God had planned for him. Many difficulties he faced, but he would never renounce what he had experienced of the grace of God, despite the difficulties in his calling.

**Gospel Reading: Jesus’ call to Peter:**

- Fishing all night – best time to catch. Nothing.
- Then in full daylight, Jesus instructed him to put his nets in once more, and he had this huge catch of fish.
- Filled with a sense of unworthiness, he asked Jesus to move away from him, a sinner!
- Despite that, Jesus called Peter to share in his work.
- Jesus called Peter to a new life, a new work, and a new purpose.

He called others too – as we know he calls each person, inviting them to know and experience God’s love and to respond to it. We read phrases in the Gospels such as *“he forsook all and followed him”*.

(potentially) Frightening!

Ways in which I’ve heard preachers focus on that. And some firebrand evangelists, who present it in a way that makes it sound that following God is the most miserable thing to do, even if essential!

Other reactions: “That’s fine for others”, we may say.

So what is God calling us to?

God’s call is to everyone. ALL to know and love God.

Revelation of God most perfect in Jesus.

Special, dedicated love – not as one “love” amongst others as in “I love ice cream and movies”.

Within that – God may well call some to specific tasks and ministry. For some, like for Peter or Paul, it may involve a totally new lifestyle. Some may need to forsake some things / others - many things, in order to be faithful to this love we have received and chosen to respond to.

And that can be scary. Involves trust, at most basic level. Can I trust God’s call, God’s intentions in calling me?

Peter’s response: Go away. I am unworthy. I am inadequate for God’s task, let alone God’s friendship.

Paradox: When aware of own weakness, God strengthens us

People who start off believing in their own greatness, with out a serious dose of humility, can do harm.

People primarily seeking their own glory, rely on their own resources.

When we experience / acknowledge our own emptiness, God fills and equips and enables us.

(In everyday life, many of us are competent people, so may not have an overriding sense of emptiness or inability etc. – yet when called to do stuff for God, suddenly become weak at the knees)

God often enables us, in conjunction with others – we are not ‘lone rangers’. A principal calling for all Christians is to be and to become instruments of God’s grace.

That is an option available to every person.

Rephrased – to accept God’s call, Jesus’ call, to be instruments of the grace of God in the lives of others.

If we feel useless / scared / sinful / unworthy – it is OK to tell God that... and to deal with it.

But to tell that to God... and leave it at that – is a cop-out.

How does all this relate to the personal stuff I began with? I used the phrase – “Wouldn’t have it any other way”. Knowing what we know and experience of Joshua and Hannah – imagine having said “No” to that? We didn’t know it all beforehand – and even if we were told, and imagined certain things, it can never be the same as the actual experience of it.

(Used that as example, rather than the experience of my calling to ordained ministry – you could relate more readily to this example than to one dealing with ordained ministry, and someone may say instead – ‘that proves it, this is about a call to be “an apostle or a prophet or a priest” – and that’s not for me, so finish your sermon and let’s get on with life!’) I don’t want to give anyone that excuse.

Honest: Fears of disruption to our lives

Time

Money

Reputation

Any agenda other than my own

**Questions to end with / to consider now and later...**

- How does God call us? (highlight a few ways in which God does so)
- How has God called you? How have he heard / experienced God’s call

- Have you considered that before?

If so...

If not...

- Have you used failure / fear as an excuse?
- Have you ever been called in some way, and turned away?

If you have, you're in good company, along with millions – including Peter, Paul & Isaiah;

But their reluctant response was only an initial response which was later set aside for a fuller, agreeing response to honour the call from God; they were transformed, not only in their relationship with God but also in their reliance on God. They were able to do things they never previously would have thought possible. And they were major “conveyors” of the grace of God.

Paradox:

God strengthens us in weakness

God fills us in our emptiness

Using that wonderful proverbial way of speaking: Put our hands into the hands of God;

Let Jesus walk alongside us, encouraging us as we follow him and keep responding to his call

Be reminded of God's spirit dwelling inside us (temples of God's Spirit – as in my sermon 3 weeks' ago)

Use the words of Isaiah: Here am I Lord: Send me!