

Sunday 19th January

Isaiah 49:1-7

1 Corinthians 1:1-9

John 1:29-42

The Church of England is always looking for new ways to help people in their faith; to help people pray and think about what God is saying through the Bible and to apply that faith to everyday life.

You might be surprised by that statement. Perhaps its not our experience of the good old Church of England. Perhaps we think its still much the same today as it was some 50 years ago. Some of the words updated but essentially the same services and hymns and prayers. And maybe that's how we would like it to be.

But the reason I say that is that the Church of England has embraced new ways of communication. Not simply in communicating information – though there have been great steps forward in this using the internet and social media. For example its now possible using the Church near You website for anyone to easily find their parish church and access details about regular services and how to contact that church to enquire about baptisms or weddings. But the Church of England has also developed ways of communicating suggestions for how individuals can cultivate their own prayer lives, grow with God and continue on their journey of faith. Ways that are easy to access, easy to use and easy to benefit from.

This week they have launched something called “Everyday faith”. Registering with this means that a daily email will be sent to you with a short Bible reading, a few notes reflecting on that reading and what the reading might mean for a Christian in their daily life, an illustration from someone's experience of faith in everyday life and a short prayer. It takes little more than 5 minutes to work through the material, but time well spent at the start of a day. Its also available as a booklet, or as an App to download onto a smart phone.

Now I'm not simply doing a plug for central church resources, nor am I on commission from Church House publishing. The reason I mention it is because the word that came to me from our 3 readings this morning was calling. Being called; being chosen; being beckoned to follow. And being called by God in

particular. And that word resonated with things I have picked up this week from the Everyday faith material.

In the reading from Isaiah - ***The Lord called me before I was born and the Holy One of Israel has chosen you***

From Paul's letter to the church in Corinth - ***Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus and by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.***

And in the gospel - ***Jesus said to them, 'Come and see'.*** not actually using the word, but certainly conveying the same thought

I wonder what comes to mind when you think of someone being called by God? Probably what we might call a vocation (same word – from Latin word VOCARE to call). A vocation like teaching or nursing or the ordained ministry or some kind of missionary work in the church. But probably not a run of the mill job or our ordinary everyday routine and possibly boring life.

And we might think the readings back up that kind of image of calling. Isaiah the prophet being called, or maybe it refers to the calling of the servant figure he was writing about – often thought to be Jesus as foretold many years before. And the first reference from the letter to the Corinthians is about Paul being called – certainly a man called to do some special missionary work and teaching work within the early church.

But the other references present a much wider picture of calling. In that letter Paul says that each of his readers – the ordinary members of that church in Corinth - each of them is called by God into the fellowship. Called to be a Christian. Regardless of their profession or job or role within the church.

And in the gospel Jesus calls Andrew and his friend to come and see, to follow. The same invitation he gave to countless others. Come and see. Come and join this movement. Come into the fellowship; join in the journey. No mention here of roles or tasks. The only mention being the following.

One of the things that has come out loud and clear in the readings and thoughts from the Everyday Faith emails this week is that we are all called by God.

Amongst the stories that have been shared are ones about a hairdresser, a police officer, a plumber, someone who works in an ordinary office, a school child, a teacher, a nurse and a retired couple who enjoy travelling by bus and chatting to the people they meet.

Ordinary people going about their ordinary everyday lives, but seeking to follow God in what they do and who they are. Seeking to respond to that call which each received to be a follower; a Christian.

So what is your calling?

Maybe you've never thought of things in those terms before. But at some stage, at some time you have probably responded to a call. A "come and see" from Jesus. You might not put it quite like that, but you are here. In church; praying and responding to God; seeking to live your life as best you can. He called. You followed. Come and see.

The interesting thing about the people who have been featured in the Everyday faith stories is that they are all aware that their calling as Christians has an effect over the whole of their lives. Affects what they do at home, at work, at school, with friends, with neighbours, in leisure activities, in relationships, in everything they do and everything they say and everything they are. They have all found that they cannot divide their lives into church bits and the other bits. God calls them to follow him in everything, to come and see what he can do with them and through them whatever their task or role is.

Our primary calling will always be to be a follower of Jesus. It's up to us to work out – with God guiding us – how that overall calling will express itself in the way we live – in the ways God calls us to live day by day. And that part will change over time depending on circumstances.

Perhaps your calling to follow expresses itself at school or college, at home with small children, at your paid employment, the place where you volunteer. It could be anywhere.

If you are retired, you can probably look back to the days of your paid employment and be fairly certain what God was calling you to do – to work at your job or your career to the best of your ability and integrity. Maybe now it's a bit more difficult. Something of your identity – your calling perhaps - might seem to have disappeared.

But I am sure that God still has plenty for us to do. Whatever our stage of life. Whether we are young and bringing up a family, balancing those responsibilities with paid employment and church activities. Or more mature when perhaps we have more time to choose what to do. There will always be opportunities that come from him, for us to follow him in our everyday lives.

They will change of course. And perhaps for some of us that change becomes more painful and more confusing as we get older and cannot physically do the things we once could do and perhaps still want to do. Even then God still calls us to do things and perhaps more importantly to be. His “come and see” call is not time limited. Maybe we come to the point where we spend more time praying for people; more time phoning people up to encourage them and support them. More time doing less active things – just being there for people for example - but things that still make a difference.

Think of that retired couple and their bus journeys and conversations. Conversations that enabled them to talk about their faith and to offer to pray for people.

In the gospel story today Jesus said to Andrew and to Peter and to countless others Come and See. He still says that today. To you and to me. Everyday of our life. He calls us to follow him; calls us to speak for him, to act for him, to pray to him and to trust him. Calls us to come and see what he has in store for us.

Calls us to accompany him on the journey. Promising that he will be there alongside us in all that we do, all that we are, everyday of our lives.