

St Nicholas' Anglican Church, Mordialloc, Sunday 10th February, 2019 (Epiphany 5)

Revd Dr Sharne Rolfe, Vicar

Readings:

Isaiah 6:1-8

Ps 138

1 Cor 15:1-11

Luke 5:1-11

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. Amen.

Sermon: Yes!

Well I'm not sure if you picked it up or not, but there's a bit of a theme going on in our Scripture readings, including from the Psalms, this morning. There often is, of course, but this Sunday's theme is probably even more obvious than usual. And that is the theme of how God uses people for the work of God even though they themselves are pretty sure they are most unsuited, even unworthy, for the task at hand.

In our second reading, 1 Cor 15, Paul is writing to the Corinthians about the good news of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. In describing what happened when Jesus rose from the dead, and who he appeared to, Paul notes that Jesus appeared also to him. He writes: "Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." In the Gospel of Luke, we have Jesus calling the first disciples near the Sea of Galilee. Simon Peter, who would eventually be called the rock of the church by Jesus, says "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" In Psalm 138, the psalmist says "I walk in the midst of trouble." And finally, in Isaiah, that greatest of prophets declares "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and live among a people of unclean lips."

Not up to the task on our own assessment of ourselves. Not worthy of this calling from God. I doubt there'd be anyone who has seriously reflected on the Christian life, and on their own journey as a

Christian, who would not relate to these feelings, these sentiments. I am the least. I am unfit. I am sinful. I am in the midst of trouble. I am lost. At one time or another we've all felt these things, or I hope we have. Because they speak to the reality of the human condition. To say otherwise is a fabrication, a sham. Acceptance of how things really are, how we really are, is one of the important steps on our pilgrimage to God. So each and every one of the people in our Scripture readings today reassure us that, if we are honest, as God wants us to be, we all fall short, often in spectacular ways. Just think of Paul! But the good news is what comes next. God uses these unfit, sinful, troubled and lost people for God's work, in spectacularly wonderful ways.

Let's listen again to the words of Scripture:

Paul writes: "Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God." But, Paul continues, "by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them - though it was not I, but the grace of God that is in me."

Simon Peter says: "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" But Jesus says, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." And, Luke tells us, when Simon Peter and James and John, the sons of Zebedee, brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed Jesus.

The psalmist says "... though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve me from the wrath of my enemies; you stretch out your hand, and your right hand delivers me ..."

And finally, in Isaiah, that greatest of prophets declares "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean like, and live among a people of unclean like; yet [and its an important yet], my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!"

What amazing, spectacular transformations of lives self assessed as troubled, sinful, lost. How can we account for such transformations? What, most importantly, can we learn from their lives about our lives, and our own journey of faith? The standard explanation is of course that all things are possible with God, and thats a pretty great place to start. All things are possible with God, and Paul's life, Isaiah's life, the psalmist's life, the apostles' lives and indeed the lives of all who come

to God, who come to Christ, are testament to that. The central message of the Christian faith is one of transformation, of new life, of unexpected new life, new hope, love and faith. If we don't get that, we don't get the Christian faith. But how does the transformation come about? How do these miracles happen? How might they happen to us?

Talk to any Christian and they will have their own story of transformation, of conversion, of the miracle that is the gift of new life through Jesus Christ. Often the miracle is enacted through a relationship with someone else, another person, someone whom God uses to help the transformation, the conversion, get underway. In my own life, Christian conversion occurred in this way, and for that person of God who God used to bring me to faith, I give eternal thanks to God. It was the same with my call to ordained ministry. I heard the call through the grace of God through the words of another human being, if not exactly just like you and me, then near enough!

We all have our own stories about how conversion and transformation has come about in our life. For Isaiah it was a seraph holding a live coal to his lips, at which point, his guilt departed and his sin was blotted out. Then, and only then, with his guilt departed, his sin blotted out, did he hear God say, "Whom shall I send?" And then, and only then, with that transformation of life underway, could Isaiah respond to God's question with those most powerful of words, "Here I am; send me!" For the psalmist, it was the sense the psalmist had of God's hand stretched out to him. He writes: "Though I walk in the midst of trouble ... you stretch out your hand, your right hand delivers me." For Paul, it was the clearly the act of the grace of God ... but also his willingness to work hard through that grace. And for Peter and the other apostles, it was their willingness, indeed as it was for all the people we meet in today's readings, their willingness to say "Yes!"

*And they left everything and followed him.*

*And I said, 'Here I am, Lord. Send me!'*

There is a saying around church circles that 90% of our work involves just turning up. I think there's a lot of truth in that. There are big "yesses" to God that we all must make in our Christian journey - yesses like the yes of Isaiah, and of Paul, and of Simon Peter and the other apostles. Without those great big yesses we cannot really get our Christian journey underway. But in reality, after that, the Christian journey is more often made up of a whole lot of what we might call "little

yesses”: the yes to make time in our life every day for prayer; the yes of making a goodly-sized gift of our time and talents to the life of the church; the yes to making a financial contribution that stretches our generosity in Godly ways to the work of the church; the yes to turn up at church every Sunday; the yes to seek forgiveness and make repentance when we have sinned (as we all do); the yes to loving our neighbours as ourselves; the list goes on and on. All the yesses, in other words, that truly make up the transformed, converted Christian life. Its in all these little yesses, along with that great big initial yes to God, that the Christian life takes its form.

And the really good news is that in all this, we’re not doing it by ourselves. It is, after all, happening through the grace of God. The psalmist in Psalm 138 says: “On the day I called, you answered me, *you increased my strength of soul.*” Again, “On the day I called, you answered me, *you increased my strength of soul.*” What a beautiful concept that it, strength of soul. Last week I talked in my sermon about how its all about the heart. Of course, its also all about the soul. I pray that we will all know, through prayer and through all the yesses we can make in our ongoing Christian journey, that we will know what this means, this increase in the strength of our soul. I pray that we will all grow in our knowledge of this, this sense of growing strength of soul, in the midst of the realities of our troubled, sinful, lost-feeling lives. And that out of this human reality, in all its messiness, our sense of God stretching out a hand to us will grow, stronger and stronger every day.

+In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.