

Epiphany 2: 18 January 2015

It is good to be with you here at Geddington & Weekley once more, and now to share in ministry with Rob as he begins his second year with you.

In our opening collect this morning Rob prayed:

In Christ you make all things new: transform the poverty of our nature by the riches of your grace, and in the renewal of our lives make known your heavenly glory.

And again, after communion he will pray:

Fill us with your Holy Spirit that through us the light of your glory may shine in all the world.

We are very bold in our praying – asking that we might be so transformed by God as to manifest his glory to the whole world.

This is, of course, the Epiphany Season, the weeks following the arrival of the Wise Men on the 12th Day of Christmas. In these weeks of the Epiphany Season, we recall Jesus being recognised, and making himself known, for who he was, by his very being as well as by the things he did – and today we reflect upon that self-revelation being evident in his calling of some of his disciples, of which we just heard in our gospel reading.

Before reflecting on that gospel reading itself, we might notice that the calling of the first disciples is pre-figured in a number of instances in the OT, where God calls individuals to specific tasks. We were reminded of one of them in our first reading this morning – the calling of Samuel.

Samuel's mother, Hannah, had been greatly distressed because she had no children. She had come to the temple and prayed fervently that she might be able to have a son, promising God that, if she did have a son, she would dedicate him to God's service.

Hannah did then give birth to her son, Samuel, and true to her word, when he was old enough, she fulfilled her promise and brought him to the elderly priest, Eli, to serve with him in the temple. The story ended even more happily for Hannah, for having kept her promise to God with regard to giving Samuel to God's service, she then went on to have three more sons and two daughters, who remained at home with her.

So young Samuel came to live and to serve in the temple and, as we were reminded in our reading, as he lay down one night, he thought he heard old Eli calling him. Samuel went straight to Eli, but Eli said: *I did not call you; lie down again.* Three times this happened, until Eli realised that it must be God himself calling the boy, for there was no one else there. So Eli told Samuel, if he calls you again, say:

Speak Lord, for your servant is listening.

So Samuel went and lay down again, and when God called out again, Samuel did indeed say:

Speak, for your servant is listening.

The Lord spoke to Samuel that night, giving him bad news for Eli. Eli's sons had been stealing for themselves the gifts that people had been bringing to God, and so they were unworthy to follow in their father's footsteps as priests in God's temple.

Old Eli was wise and holy. He realised that Samuel wouldn't want to tell him this bad news, but he insisted on hearing it, and it rang true for him. He knew that it was indeed God who had spoken to Samuel.

So we, we who are so bold in our public praying – *that we might be so transformed by God as to manifest his glory to the whole world* – are we equally bold in our private prayers? Do we, like Samuel and Eli, do we listen for the voice of God? Indeed, as a Christian community, as we come together in worship and at other times to meet and reflect and plan: do we listen for the voice of God – do we genuinely expect to hear from him and to be transformed by our encounter with him? Does our encounter with the living God shape our life and service together?

In our gospel reading: Jesus calls Phillip, who immediately goes off in search of Nathaniel, telling *him*:

We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote.

As sceptical Nathaniel approaches Jesus, Jesus recognises him for who he is – *an Israelite in whom there is no deceit* – and also knows where he was when Philip called him – *I saw you under the fig tree*, Jesus says.

Nathaniel's spontaneous response to Jesus' insight is:

Rabbi, you are the son of God, you are the King of Israel.

In Jesus' calling of his disciples, *they* immediately seem to perceive something of who he is: the lamb of God, the Messiah, the one written about in the law and the prophets, the son of God, the king of Israel.

They immediately seem to perceive something of who he is, and of the significance of his call upon their lives. Their response is immediate and it is total, and their lives are changed forever.

Are we equally perceptive and responsive, as we wait upon God? - for just as Jesus called *them*, so he calls *us* – just as Samuel and Nathaniel were called, so we are called. We, as individual Christian disciples, and we, as Christian communities, are called repeatedly to make a *renewed commitment to the purposes of God*.

As we follow Jesus, individually and together, we expect it to change us.

As Cardinal Henry Newman in the C19th said:

To live is to change, and to become perfect is to have changed often.

Later in John's gospel, we hear Jesus say:

Abide in me as I abide in you

Abide in my love.

You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last.

May we abide, may we make our home in, our relationship with God and be attentive to his call – the call of God on our individual lives, and his call on the lives of each of our churches, to make a fresh commitment to his purposes, and to bear *fruit* that will last.

In the church in this land, at this stage in its history, many of us perceive Jesus to be calling us, in particular, to be his more effective witnesses. He is calling us to do as Philip did with Nathaniel. He is calling us to invite others to *come and see* what we have seen, to share with us in recognising Jesus for who he is.

May we be ready and willing, then, to be changed by Jesus. Through the action of his Holy Spirit upon us, may we be ready and willing to be changed into that which he calls us to be – a community, a body, united in his love and active in witness and service.

May God bless you and make you ever more fruitful in these parishes as, individually and together, you seek, we seek, to respond *more fully* to his call.

G Steele 2015