

**Anglican Church of Freiburg
Morning Worship with Christine Ghinn
6th February 2022
The Third Sunday before Lent**



Homily: Vocation for the Rest of Us

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be pleasing to you, our God.

Wow! What amazing texts the lectionary presents us with today! First, we find ourselves together with Isaiah in a magnificent hall that is filled to the brim with holiness and divine glory. God sits on his throne, his garments reaching to the edges of the room. Angels are all around and the

air is filled with smoke. Shouts of "Holy, holy, holy!!!" make the walls vibrate.

Secondly, there is that famous scene at the Sea of Galilee: Jesus boards Peter's boat to teach jaw-dropping sermons to a crowd of curious listeners on the shore. People leave inspired and amazed. Jesus makes Peter cast out his nets against all odds, which fill with such a gigantic amount of fish, that other boats have to be called for help.

Two scenes of dazzling imagery. Two epic narratives of calling. Two accounts of newly bestowed identity.

These are examples of a long line of mind-blowing accounts of conversion and calling: From Moses at the burning bush to Paul being struck blind on the road to Damascus; from Martin Luther's terrifying thunder storm encounter to modern day tales of lives turned upside down and ministries being launched.

Some of you might even also have a spectacular life story, featuring a defining moment of conversion, redemption or calling. I myself grew up in the church and faith has always been part of my life. Yes, my perception of God has changed over the years (quite a lot, actually), but none of my tiny little 'Jesus moments' matched even remotely the intensity of this morning's stories and the testimonies I have heard or read. Over the years, as I listened to those fortunate individuals that have had life changing epiphanies I felt inspired and astonished. But, if I'm honest, mixed into the wonder, there was also some degree of jealousy (which, of course, I then would feel guilty about). In recent years I have learnt that this 'conversion envy' is a thing and that I'm not alone with it.

On the other hand, when I was much younger, some of these tales of calling would even scare me and make me feel very reluctant to fully trust Jesus. Because, who knows, he might expect from me crazy and dangerous acts of devotion! I remember particularly the dread I felt when hearing about Maria Heyde, who, in 1860 at the age

of 22 boarded a ship to travel from Germany to India, in order to marry, support and work with a German missionary she'd never met before. Is this what God expects from people who place their lives in his hand?!?

Let's see if Isaiah & Peter's calling bring some light to this question:

Peter, then still called Simon, had met Jesus at least once before. Jesus was a guest at Simon Peter's house and had healed his mother-in-law. They were no strangers to each other, that day by the lake, and Peter's calling had been brewing for a bit. And then there comes a moment where he is overwhelmed by God's glory! Where Isaiah sees a vision of splendour and majestic beauty, Peter is physically and mentally overwhelmed by the biggest catch of fish he's ever had in his life. God's glory appears to them both, in very different ways, speaking 'their language', meeting them where they are. It is God, who initiates the connection; he, who shows up in fullness and abundance. It's not Jesus' preaching, that stops Peter in his tracks, but a net, bursting with squirming fish. Living in Jerusalem, it is not the routines of the temple that made Isaiah pay attention, but a dreamlike vision.

To sum it up: both men are pulled out of their everyday lives and faith by an extraordinary encounter.

How does one react in moments like this? These two men are drawn and repelled at the same time by the divine. Just like Moses, Jonah and Jeremiah at different points in time, they are hesitant and acutely aware of their own imperfection and insufficiency. The contrast between their humanity and God's holiness appears to be a gulf to great to bridge.

God initiated the connection in the first place, and again is the one who takes even one more step closer by offering swift absolution by way of commissioning them as apostle and prophet. Often, when these God-encounters of Peter, Isaiah and their peers are laid before us, we're meant to identify with them, be inspired by their experiences and

feel encouraged to step out, exclaiming, "Here I am; send me!" Sure, this is an acceptable reading of these texts, yet for people like me, and maybe even one or two of you, it might cause more resistance than excitement. But let me just say: If putting yourself in these men's shoes ignites honest passion and drive to live a more Christ-like life, then WONDERFUL! 😊 I cheer you on, sister! I'd love to hear your story one day, brother!

But maybe all this talk about thrones and angels and miracles bewilders you, perhaps 'this supernatural stuff is not your thing' or you're even a little bit terrified (... because, you know, if you take this seriously, there just might be a missionary on the other side of the world waiting for you to marry them without prior meeting!).

So, what then do cowards like us do with today's reading ? How about us trying to put this into a broader context, shall we? If we do this, we notice a few things that might help us make peace with these passages:

1) Not all people whose lives were lastingly touched by the divine underwent such a radical and transformational episode. Not all followers of Christ were asked to leave behind all they had and embark on an impressive mission. Not all builders of the Kingdom of God are called to be apostles or prophets.

Let's just think of the woman at the well, who shared a profound, but much more quiet moment with Jesus. Then there is Zacchaeus, the tax collector, who did turn his life around, but still remained in his old job and home. Or what about the women who went out to attend to Jesus' dead body after his burial? They did 'what was right' without being sent out on a grand commission.

2) Next, I notice something I might want to consider when vocation envy or conversion jealousy strikes: It almost seems that the more magnificent the calling, the costlier the mission for the individual. Of course there are exceptions to this little theory of mine, but it makes sense when we consider our two bible characters: Peter's life

after his calling was quite a rollercoaster ride that ended, as tradition has it, in his brutal execution. Isaiah too, doesn't come across as one who's days were all smooth and sunny. With strong words he confronted rulers and the people, being probably not the most liked character of his day.

So maybe you and I do good in rejoicing over our, yes, unspectacular, yet gloriously quiet little lives!

3) The third aspect that jumps out is that God calls the imperfect! Does the thought sometimes cross your mind too, that you're not sent on a mission, because you have nothing to offer? Well, then you and I are in good company! Peter, Isaiah, Paul, Moses and many other great people of faith know this inkling all too well!

Turns out, that God prefers to work with flawed folks like us. We all join as greenhorns and shake our heads at Jesus' confidence in us. We all are called to slowly unlearn our harsh and mind-numbing self-beating and let the way Jesus looks at us shape our identity. And this, my friends, is a task that is better done together, than alone. This is what we need each other for! You might not yet believe what Jesus says you are on the inside, but we surely do!

And, as a little sidenote, keeping in mind that God calls the imperfect might be a good exercise against putting perceived high-achieving Christians on too high of a pedestal.

4) And lastly, God's glory is manifest in more than lofty visions or fishy miracles! Maybe you recognise God's presence in a dream, like Isaiah, or a great day at work, like Peter. Maybe you encounter universal truths by considering the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, like Jesus did. In the bible we see God over and over again initiating connection with people, right where they are, speaking their language. I'm sure he still does, to this day, even here in Freiburg, in our ordinary lives.

So, is that it now? No grand commission for little people like you and me? Are only the Peters and Isaiahs of this world entrusted with 'a Ministry'?

Fulfilling Christ's commission will look differently for each of us, and if it means for you to marry a missionary in the Himalayan mountains, then kudos to you!

For the rest of us, I'd suggest we join those less glamorous people of God, by keeping what Jesus considered the greatest commandment: " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself."

This also includes not judging those who tell their awe-inspiring life stories. We might think critically about some of the systems they are part of, but we can't see inside of their heart of hearts.

So, perhaps this morning we might hear the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us into this week and into the ordinary day-to-day?" And we might say, "Here we are; send us!"

Intercessions (by Klaus)

Response: Lord, you seek us here and now

Open our hearts and minds to hear and accept your calling

Lord, let our prayer before you be honest, yet full of hope, realistic, yet with high expectations, humble , yet encouragd by your promises.

Lord, we all come before you today with different stories different burdens, different longings, needs and prayers. Hear us o Lord as we stand before you answer us as we seek your presence. Come towards us as you have done in with Isaiah, Peter and so many others we read about in the bible.

Let us pray first for ourselves who have accepted you as Lord. Lord open our eyes to see your glory, open our hearts to feel your love and our minds to accept the miracle of life, creation and all that we encounter every day a new. Lord grant us again the blessing of moments of your presence in our lives, that will encourage us to continue our walk with you. Lord, let us not be too busy, too self-reliant, too hurt to hear your voice,

Lord, you seek us here and now

Open our hearts and minds to hear and accept your calling

Lord, let us pray also with all of us who are seeking who have not encountered you, who are not sure who you are. Lord, we pray that you reveal yourself to them, that their questions, their doubts, their worries will be met in honest, sincere love by you, that there will be no division between followers and seekers but mutual respect and acceptance as we walk our lives together in this world. Let our lives be witness let our hands be a gentle invitation, let our friendship be a warm welcome, let our church community be a place of your presence

Lord, you seek us here and now

Open our hearts and minds to hear and accept your calling

Lord, let us pray for our families and friends. Lord, we want to also pray for our immediate families, our children, parents, siblings who have not met you or have went away from you. Let us not forcefully pray because we are right and they are wrong, good and bad or saved and condemned, but rather out of the gentle love which wants to share everything that we have encountered as beautiful and rich. Lord, like Christ let us learn to become vessels in your hands spreading the fragrance and joy which can come with faith in you. Lord, let us not give up to pray for our friends and family that they may one day be in communion with you.

Lord, you seek us here and now

Open our hearts and minds to hear and accept your calling

Lord, we want to pray for all who are going through difficult times because of isolation, depression, sickness, financial difficulties, separation, loss of loved ones, anxiety, failing exams, expectations or important goals in their lives. Lord, we pray that they can here your voice even in the darkness, they can see our presence even in the desparate noise surrounding them. Lord, send us to be the light your voice for them in this moment. Let us pray for those who are on our mind including Beth, Margaret, Almut, Daphne, George, Peter, John Samways, and their close ones. (moment of silence of personal prayer)

Lord, you seek us here and now

Open our hearts and minds to hear and accept your calling

Lord, let us pray for our church. We thank you for Vinod and his family, we thank you for all in our church who are willing to contribute to make this church your house of prayer and worship, our wardens Iris and Christine, the church council, the musicians, the sides people and all the different services. Lord, bless us, guide us this year how we can be involved in building a community of welcome, of faith, of your grace. Lord, we pray this also for your larger church worldwide, bring men, women and children of faith to follow your call.

Lord, you seek us here and now

Open our hearts and minds to hear and accept your calling

Lord in closing we want to pray for the world which is so beautiful yet so hurt, so full of potential yet falling short, so full of love yet audible cries of hatred, war and calamities. Lord, send us in our daily lives to be part of your large family to make a difference

Amen