

## SERMON AT ST DAVID'S, BURNSIDE, ON SUNDAY

2 FEBRUARY 2025

'I'm being called by God!'. How many of us have had to consider that, and how have we answered?

There have been many, many people in every age who have echoed the words 'I'm being called by God!' I have been called by God to be this or that, to do this or that. The priests of the church you would expect to say that, and with conviction.

Most recently President Trump has testified that he has been saved from the assassin's bullet by God to save America. Who can tell the truth of that? We await confirmation not least because saving America could mean saving Australia and on a more expansive note, saving the free world.

Being called to become involved in a movement, to follow a particular path, to espouse a particular doctrine of belief can be a frightening and challenging moment for the individual. It can be a moment of self-realization - that this is what I am to do. The call can be from within or from without.

For Jeremiah it was a call from without, *"Now the word of the Lord came to me saying." "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations."*

In a few weeks we shall meet as a vestry to make a few important decisions. Most of them will involve the members of vestry acting together. But some decisions may well involve individual members acting apart.

Fr Lyndon has not asked me to mention vestry, but given our readings today about being called, the manner of being called, and the risks involved in responding positively to that call, it seems appropriate. Whether the call comes from within or without, it serves as a valuable example.

Jeremiah's initial response is to plead his inability to speak eloquently, and with confidence, and without fear. Those three elements ought to be evident in the way a prophet speaks. And Jeremiah doesn't think he has them. He's probably right. Jeremiah is also most probably fearful of failure. Who would dare fail when God is involved in such a personal way?

To this understandable response by Jeremiah God says, 'Do not be afraid, for I am with you, I will deliver you.'

God doesn't say, don't be silly Jeremiah! "Would I ask you to do this on your own!"

No, God says 'I am with you to deliver you from your fears and doubts because you will speak my words not yours. The eloquence of the words you speak, and their meaning, will be the product of my own making.'

Turning to the issues of the Corinthian church St Paul instructs the members of the church to exercise their calling as Christians amongst the Greek population with greater understanding.

From the beginning of his letter to the Corinthian church he identifies that the divisions in the church are harmful to the Christian message. There are differing views in the church about issues, there are differing views of what it means to be a Christian in a community that isn't Christian. There is rancour. Some favour Peter, some favour Apollos, and some favour Paul as foundation leaders of the Christian community in Corinth and beyond.

Who will ever forget the damage done to the church in our own time as some people acted in ways that showed the non-Christian world that the church can be corrupt and speaks with forked tongue. And for a long time, divisions between Christian denominations haven't helped the proclamation of the gospel. We know this to be true. And as Fr Lyndon reminds us every Sunday we are the church; the church is us. Collectively we make the church on earth what it is. Fortunately the scriptures are there to help us to make it better.

Paul speaks lucidly about the value of love over arrogance and rudeness. He says that the Christian must bear patiently and indeed with a positive demeanour faithful to the notion that all will be well. Similarly believing that God's prompting of Jeremiah. 'I am with you to deliver you.' Is also meant for us.

Then there are the words of Luke that describe the surprise people exhibit when they heard Jesus speak the words of Isaiah the prophet graciously and with clarity of meaning. In the end familiarity with Jesus, knowing who his parents were bred contempt for him and of course his audacious follow-up words.

So, with these lessons in mind what will be our attitude from now on? But there's one more thing I would like you to take on board.

I came across this quotation from 'An Old Man on the River Bank', by George Seferis. I give it to you as a help in you knowing what to do.

*"I want no more than to speak simply, to be granted that grace. Because we've loaded even our songs with so much music that they're slowly sinking and we've decorated our art so much that its features have been eaten away by gold and it's time to say our few words because tomorrow our soul sets sail."*

With those words in mind together with the words of today's three readings let us with renewed willingness be open to the call of God. Perhaps to participate in proclaiming the words he wants others to hear, and to be trusting of his call. To behave in a calm, kind, and patient manner, not arrogantly or rudely for that does no one any good. To treat that way of behaviour as a call from God. St Paul sums up the activity of those who are called by God to be loving in every situation and in every respect. And I think Paul would say, live in the image of God. For as he treats you and me, so treat others in the same way. Isn't that the golden rule?

Ultimately when exercising God's calling, we shouldn't be surprised when others are surprised. And don't be surprised and hurt when those who witness our actions take offence because they know where we have come from and who they think we are. Remember that in baptism we are a new creation. The old has passed away.

The vestry meeting is just around the corner. It will be a good time and place to act in the way today's lessons reveal. And beyond that day.

You and I have been called by God to be his people. Is there any doubt about that?

Fr John