

**Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> February 2019**  
**4<sup>th</sup> Sunday before Lent (C)**

**Liverpool Parish Church**

**OT: Isaiah 6.1-8**

**NT: I Corinthians 15.1-11**

**G: Luke 5.1-11**

*Abraham went to Oxford to Prepare for Life, which was the Reverend's (his father) term for what Abraham was to do while waiting to get the Call. He was to go up to Oxford and read Classics..... Read and wait; that was the plan.*

*God had a good few clients in those days and He hadn't had anyone invent mobiles or texting yet so it took time to get around to calling them each individually at whatever they were doing, so you just had to wait. The Vocation would come in due course; the Reverend was sure. Abraham was going into the Ministry. After all, Soul-polishing was the family business.*

*So (Abraham) my grandfather waited.*

*You'd think with him having that big-hint name, Abraham, he'd have gotten the Call right away. It was like he was knocking at the door. I suppose that God might have thought that it was a bit forward of him. He might have thought Abraham had a case of the Mickey Nolans who Nan says thinks three fingers of hair gel and pointy shoes makes him The Chosen One.*

*But no, The Call didn't come. The Almighty Fisher wasn't fishing.*

Unlike some of my more illustrious colleagues, I am unable to quote from my own book. This was an extract from History of Rain by the Irish writer Niall Williams.

I sometimes think that people fall into one of two camps.

Those enthusiastic volunteers, the first child to put their hand up for anything in class, the Pick Me, Pick Me brigade.

And then there are those of us who are like people at the beginning of a meeting when it becomes clear that a minute taker will be required.

Suddenly, there is something interesting on the floor which must be stared at, or it's imperative to check for a third time that your phone is switched off.

All eye contact is withdrawn and silent prayers are raised – please not me, not me.

Until, thank God, someone else cracks first and volunteers and collective relief is sighed.

I cannot begin to imagine or would ever presume to know what criteria God employs when he chooses those for whom he has great plans, those he calls to continue the work of his kingdom.

But based on the readings today, you could be forgiven for thinking that God errs of the side of the reluctant, those with insight to know their unworthiness, those who quickly see that they will achieve little by their own efforts, those who rely completely on the grace of God.

*Isaiah - Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!*

This is Isaiah who is one of the great prophets of the Old Testament, who challenged kings, who risked his life to boldly speak out the word of God, who in his writing describes Jesus from birth to death to resurrection as though he stood before him and not that the earthly life of the Son of God lay centuries in the future. Isaiah, a man filled with the Holy Spirit.

*Paul - 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.*

By his own admittance, Paul persecuted the members of the early Church. He held the cloaks of the men that stoned Stephen, the first Christian martyr. He witnessed this death and thought it a good thing, a deterrent for all those who seem inflamed by this new radical movement.

This is the same Paul who was called by the risen Jesus to use his gifts of determination, organisation and a fierce belief in whatever he believed to be right, to use these gifts to spread the good news of the kingdom of God in the name of Jesus Christ. By the grace of God, Paul carried the gospel and the promise of freedom from sin across all the known world. He made as many enemies as friends, he suffered all kinds of persecution, enjoyed the hospitality of rich and poor and wrote sublime passages of scripture as well as those which continue to rankle and irk today. Paul was true to his calling even to the point of death. His certainty in the love of Jesus Christ as Son of God was never shaken.

*Peter - But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.' When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.*

Peter recognised Jesus as Lord and his own unworthiness to be in the presence of God.

By following Jesus, he trusted that somehow these two things were not mutually exclusive,

he trusted that God knew what he was about and that somehow all would be well. Jesus found in Peter, this impetuous fisherman, this man who so often seemed to just miss the point, whose faith did waver; when he set out to walk across the sea to Jesus and suddenly panicked and sank, when despite all his best intentions three times denied Jesus through fear. Jesus found in Peter the person to build his Church, to lead his followers when Jesus ascended back to the Father, to bring the love and forgiveness that he had experienced first hand to all people, even though it cost him his life. Peter who brings hope to all of us who doubt, Peter the supreme example of the power of the grace of God.

Each one of us has somehow, somewhere, heard Jesus call our name or we would not be here in this church this morning. We might think we know why we are here but I wouldn't bet on it. God's ways are mysterious and his plan for each one of us is not always obvious. We do not always see the seeds we sow or the fruit they bear. I am willing to bet that many of us fall into the unwilling minute takers camp and doubt our abilities to live up to the task required of us, to be worthy in the presence of God.

Isaiah, Paul and Peter were reluctant to hear the call of God and to follow but they opened themselves to the grace of God. They achieved great things, not solely by their own efforts but through the might of God's grace. This grace did not change them as people. Paul was no less forceful as a Christian than he had been as a Pharisee. Peter continued to waver and have doubts. The grace of God did not change these men, it made them their true selves, the people that God had created them to be, to play their role in fulfilling his kingdom, to realise their true worth, to fully experience the love of God and in doing so to achieve the promise of eternal life.

This same grace of God is offered to each one of us as we follow Jesus. It will lead us to struggles and to glory, to times of despair and times of hope, to frustration but ultimately fulfilment so that we can say with Paul

*By the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain.*

The Revd Michelle Montrose