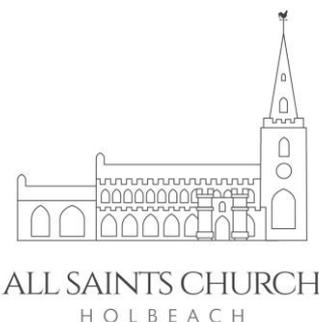


Reflection

For 04.07.21 – Trinity 5 (proper 9)

By Rosamund Seal



A Reflection on Ezekiel 2.1-5, Psalm 123, 2 Cor 12.2-10, Mark 6.1-13

Yesterday, two people from our deanery, Sally & Jane, were ordained deacon at the Cathedral. Hence today's Collect for the Sunday after Petertide reads thus: – *'hear our prayer which we offer for all your faithful people, that in their vocation and ministry they may serve you in holiness and truth to the glory of your name.'*

For the same reason, the Sunday after Petertide is also known as Vocations Sunday – a day for each of us to reflect on our vocation as Christian people. Not a bad thing to be doing as you join the majority of the rest of the deanery and move into vacancy! There absolutely no need for the church to decline during a vacancy – or at least not if each of us take our own vocation seriously.

But notice that it is *'all faithful people'* not just the clergy who are called to discern their own ministry and serve God through it. It is a ministry of discernment and service that we share, and the church will only grow and thrive if that ministry is shared – if each of us pray that prayer both for ourselves and for each other.

However, recognising that we all have a call to contribute our ministry and grow the church, can be a daunting one.

Our deacons were ordained yesterday, as I was 27 years ago, on the feast of Doubting Thomas – very appropriate for most ordinands who quite often doubt themselves and their calling at various points during their curacies – it goes with the territory - it is all part of the process of formation!

But they and we are in good company for it was the same in the Old Testament for Ezekiel:

God knew that the majority of people would reject Ezekiel's prophecy and says to him: *'O mortal, stand up on your feet, and I will speak with you – I am sending you to the people of Israel, to a nation of rebels who have rebelled against me.'* But he ends by telling him – that is the way of it. Even if they ignore you.....

Whether they hear or refuse to hear (for they are a rebellious house), they shall know that there has been a prophet among them..... I am still sending you and you still need to give it a go.

It was the same for Jesus' disciples:

Jesus needed help – that is why he selected his disciples, that is why he taught them and that is why, once he had taught them, he sent them out in pairs. He knew that many would reject them but his response was along the lines of; *'never mind, you must expect that, for amongst those that scorn and reject you there will also be those that respond.'*

Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place. If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet, as a testimony that is against them.

Just share the message – if it is accepted, it is accepted – if it is not, it is not.

... and maybe he even went on to remind them of the story of the lost sheep.....

It is there even the words of the psalm, God knows that his people are going to be rejected ; *'Have mercy upon us, O Lord, have mercy, for we have had more than enough of contempt, too much of the scorn of the indolent rich, and of the derision of the proud.'*

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Some of you may remember 'Back to Church Sunday' an initiative started in 2009 whereby people were encouraged to invite people 'back to church' on a specific Sunday in September, but which is now replaced by a season of welcome in early Autumn.

It has never been about inviting 'a rebellious people', it is not asking you to invite the 'indolent rich and the proud' – though of course you can if you want to..... No, it is about inviting the lost sheep – those who used to go to church but don't any more. It may be those who used to worship here at All Saints, or those who went to church where they lived previously, or those who went to church as children, or perhaps those who have had a bad experience of church in the past but who have not entirely lost their faith. And you will find that there a surprising number of people who fall into those categories.

We need to overcome our natural inclination to fear rejection, and our natural inclination to think – who am I to extend an invitation to someone else – surely that is the vicars job? And we make excuses for ourselves or feel we are not worthy enough, or clever enough, or even ell enough.

But what God says is - that his Grace *'is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.'*

Paul, the greatest missionary of all time, Paul, talks of his weakness – the *thorn in his flesh* which he may often have thought limited his zeal and limited the amount that he could do – eventually realized, probably after much heart-searching, (it must have been hard for a man such as he), must have realized that it kept his feet on the ground. Paul realised that it stopped him becoming arrogant, that actually it allowed God's grace to work through him more effectively *'for power is made perfect in weakness'*.

Even our weaknesses – the things that make us struggle, the things that make us feel inadequate can be used as part of our ministry. They show that we are not perfect, that we are all in need of God's grace and what is even more important they allow others, who know that they too are not perfect, that they too have weaknesses, to know that there is room in God's heart, and indeed in God's church for them too. So go on – invite them in.....

Amen