

**ANGLICAN CHAPLAINCY OF ALL SAINTS' MARSEILLE**

**WITH AIX-EN-PROVENCE AND THE LUBERON**

**Reflection – 16<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Trinity – 27<sup>th</sup> September 2020**

*Canon David Pickering*

*Matthew 21.11*

*'Which of the two did the will of his father?' They said, 'The first.'*

Two sons received the call from their father to help out in the family business.

The first said, 'No thanks,' but changed his mind. The second replied, 'Yes,' but then failed to turn up.

This morning we celebrate how two other people have responded, in a very positive manner, to God's call to serve in an important ministry in his Church. Today, Jamie, our Chaplain, on the authority of the Bishop will renew the licences of our two chaplaincy Readers, Jane and Christine.

As we reflect on today's gospel, and our other readings, we can see that they are all concerned with a sense of calling.

Our Gospel passage begins with the chief priests and elders, the supposed guardians of religious authority, asking Jesus about the source of his calling. *'By what authority are you doing these things, (presumably for cleansing the Temple) and who gave you this authority?'*

We, of course, know the answer - and will think about it later. But Jesus exposes their mockery, when, in true rabbinic fashion, he asked about the calling of John the Baptist. Was it earthly or divine? Again, we know the answer.

Then in the second part of today's Gospel passage, Jesus tells how a father called both his sons, one after another, to help him in his vineyard. Here Jesus emphasises how we can only answer a call by fulfilling what we are asked to do. He tells how so-called public sinners have heard the call to repent and now have

a priority place in God's Kingdom. *'Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and prostitutes are going in the kingdom of God before you.'*

Today's New Testament reading gives us a wonderful description of Jesus' divine calling:-

*Who, though in the form of God,  
did not regard equality with God  
as something to be exploited,  
but emptied himself,  
taking the form of a slave,  
being born in human likeness,  
And being found in human form,  
he humbled himself  
and became obedient to the point of  
death -  
even death on a cross.*

Many scholars believe that in this poetic passage, St Paul is quoting from an early Christian hymn, and so it may be the oldest summary of the Christian faith in existence. And it is introduced by a summary of our own calling: *Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus. It concludes: and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

As Christine and Jane have their licenses renewed this morning, we give thanks for the call they answered when they were first authorised as Readers by their bishops: Jane ten years ago in Peterborough Cathedral and Christine in Derby Cathedral in 2002. But we not only give thanks for the ministry of Jane and Christine, we also celebrate the role of Readers in the life of the Church today. At a personal level I remember, as a four year old, being taken to Sunday School by Colin Keeber, the Reader at Narborough, and in my final English parish, I had the help of no less than three, Christine being one of them.

As we value Reader ministry today, we need to recognise their place in the history of the Church. It seems they may have even had a role in the worship of the synagogue in Jesus' time. They would have needed sufficient education to be able to translate Hebrew into the vernacular Aramaic. Was Jesus himself perhaps a Reader when he read from and expounded the passage from Isaiah 61 (Luke 4.16-21)?

The ministry of Readers is mentioned by a number of the Fathers of the Early Church, among them, Justin, Eusebius and Cyprian. By the fourth century they were being ordained as one of the minor orders of the Church. This continued in the Church in England until all minor orders were abolished at the Reformation. By the time of Elizabeth the First, there seemed to be Readers with a very limited role, just reading services, without preaching. When they were re-introduced in 1866, there had been no recorded reference to a Reader for over a century. During and after the First World War they became well established, but with limitations. They could officiate at Morning and Evening Prayer, omitting the prayer of absolution. They could preach, but not at Holy Communion. From the 1960s onwards their sphere of service has grown to what we value and appreciate today - now so extended, that in some circles they're referred to as Licensed Lay Ministers. The Reader magazine has even changed its name to Transforming Ministry!

So this morning we rejoice and give thanks for the service of Jane and Christine, and all Readers, especially those we have known and valued in places where we may have worshipped in the past.

But as we celebrate Christine and Jane in their particular calling, we should remember that we are all called by God. Wherever we may be in life, we should see our circumstances and what they bring to us as a part of our calling. *Let the same mind be in you that was in Jesus Christ.* We are to follow his way in every aspect of our lives.

The final verse of our reading from Ezekiel, ends with these resounding words: *For I have no pleasure in the death of anyone, says the Lord God. Turn then and live.*

*Turn, then and live* - a reminder that our Christian faith tells us to 'get a life.' Each precious moment we are given should be grasped and celebrated as a part of our calling from God.

We thank Christine and Jane today, so let us be encouraged in our own personal callings as they inspire us to 'GET A LIFE!'

Amen.