

WEEKLY SERMON

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Find your purpose when you hear God's call and say yes

'Send down the Holy Spirit upon your servant for the office and work of a priest in your church.'

This weekend will be one of immense joy for the Diocese of Blackburn because, amidst the simple beauty of our Cathedral Church, 24 people will be ordained; 12 as Deacons and another 12 as priests.

They are a typically diverse group. Some are male, some female; some are married, some single; some are very young, some more mature in years; some have few formal qualifications, others have more degrees than limbs; some are Catholic, some are evangelical.

But whatever their background and history, they all have one thing in common. In an act of heart-stopping beauty and outrageous courage, they have followed God's call in their lives.

Those ordinands have been called by God and they have said yes. But there is nothing exclusive about that call. You have been called. Every single Christian is called by God to serve Him.

On Sunday in many of our churches we will be listening to Mark 6, 1-13 which includes these words: "He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two and gave them authority over the unclean spirits. He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts; but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.

He said to them, '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 against them'.

So, they went out and proclaimed that all should repent. They cast out many demons and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

That passage teaches us three things about the call of God.

First, authentic call is sacrificial. The disciples are challenged to give up everything, to live simply, to go without money. Why? Because when they have sacrificed all these things they will only have God left in whom to place their trust and call bears fruit when we trust in him alone.

The Christian life is not a lifestyle bolt-on or an optional leisure activity. God wants every single part of us to serve him in the world and so He calls us to place our trust in Him alone and not in money or stuff or things. So authentic call means making sacrifices.

It means being generous with our time and talents and money. It means living more simply for the sake of the Gospel. It means doing without needless luxuries. For when we make sacrifices, we trust all the more in God. And in his power our call will bear fruit.

HEALTHY CHURCHES TRANSFORMING COMMUNITIES

Second, authentic call is communal. Jesus calls the 12 together as a community before he commissions them. Then He sends them out in pairs so that they have another disciple with whom to share the challenges.

Some people have a very strong sense of private call, but that is often to be mistrusted for God calls us into community. We are called not as individuals but as part of the Church, the body of Christ.

As Jesus gathered the 12, so we gather around him in worship which is where we draw strength and are commissioned anew. And then, whatever our call may be, it is lived out in partnership with our fellow Christians. The Christian life must never be a lonely life.

And then, thirdly, authentic call is joyful. Later in Mark 6 the disciples gather together again around Jesus to share what they have done. There is rejoicing in these gatherings as they delight in what God is doing in his world through them.

Whilst responding to God's call may bring periods of deep challenge and soul-searching, such times should not last for long and most find a deep joy in serving Jesus as he calls us to. And that joy is not about a shallow, transient cheeriness. It is a joy that is drawn deeply from the life of Jesus himself and from confidence in his saving work, for we find the purpose of our humanity when we live our lives in the way he calls us to.

So where might God be calling you? As our ordinands testify, we find our purpose when we hear God's call and say yes.

Bishop Philip North, Bishop of Burnley