



Sunday 2 June 2024

St Edmundsbury Cathedral

The First Sunday after Trinity – Proper 4

1 Samuel 3.1–10; 2 Corinthians 4.5–12; Mark 2.23 – 3.6

Sermon by the Reverend Linda Peall,

Head of Chaplaincy, East Suffolk & North Essex NHS Foundation Trust

May I speak in the name of God, the faithful Creator, the wounded Healer, and the life-giving Spirit. Amen.

I was talking with a chaplaincy colleague, Keith, about coming to the cathedral today, and about today's readings, where Samuel doesn't recognise God's voice and where Jesus and the Pharisees are wrestling to discern the will of God for the Sabbath; and Keith told me the most amazing story about what happened to his Dad who landed on Utah Beach on D-Day plus 4. He told me this "After setting up their field hospital Dad was writing a letter to my mum leaning against a tree using his greatcoat as a backrest. On hearing a warning of an artillery attack, he dived into his fox hole and whilst in the bottom of the trench he heard an audible voice say Psalm 91 verse 10. When the attack had finished, he got out of the trench and went to retrieve his New Testament and Psalms from his great coat pocket only to find his coat has been shredded by shrapnel. He opened his Bible and read: 'If you say, 'The Lord is my refuge,' and you make the Most High your dwelling, no harm will overtake you, no disaster will come near your tent.'"

I don't know about you, but I have only heard God's voice that clearly twice in my 58 years of life. Most of the time, like Samuel, I am slow to recognise that God is speaking, and, like the Pharisees, I have to wrestle hard to try and make sense of what God might be saying about the day-to-day dilemmas we face in our lives, in the church, in our society and our world.

On this day when as a Diocese we celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the Ordination of Women we know that is a cause of much rejoicing for many, many people, but still for some in the church it causes great pain. And as the church continues the process of wrestling with the Living in Love and Faith Report about identity, sexuality, relationships and marriage we know how difficult and painful that is for people on both sides of the debate.

Our own personal experience and the experience of the church tells us that hearing the voice of God and discerning the will of God is not always easy, and can be downright painful at times, but there are some things we know without a shadow of a doubt God is calling us to.

We are called to follow Jesus and to live life his way. Originally, Jesus' disciples weren't called Christians. They were called "followers of The Way", but the book of Acts tells us they were first called Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26). And that word "Christian" comes from a Greek word meaning "little Christ", and it may very well have been used as a jeer, a way of poking fun at those early followers of The Way - "Look at those 'little Christs'"! Why? Because the followers of Jesus had such a distinctly different way of behaving compared to the rest of the world, as they put into practice the love and care for others that Jesus called them to.

Like those 'little Christs' we are called to love God and to love our neighbour. We are called to act justly, to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God. We are called to put human flourishing and



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care for creation at the heart of all that we are and all that we do, as individuals and as a church. And we are called to discern the voice and call of God together. Just as Eli helped Samuel to recognise God's voice, just as Jesus challenged the Pharisees over their interpretation of the scriptures, so we are called to discern the will of God together courageously, patiently, respectfully and graciously for the sake of human flourishing and the care of creation.

And I think it's also important to recognise that as we follow Jesus, and become like 'little Christs', God is also calling us to be fully ourselves, to grow into the full-ness of all that God created us to be. In society today when so much distress is caused by comparing ourselves unfavourably to each other, the words of the Hassidic rabbi Zusya, bring a powerful challenge. Before his death, he said, "In the coming world, they will not ask me: 'Why were you not Moses?' They will ask me: 'Why were you not Zusya?'" Each one of us is called to reflect something unique about God that only we can show to the world; each of us, like one of those little mirrors on disco ball, is called to reflect something no-one else can reflect of the light and life of God, so that the kaleidoscope of light, beauty and glory that is God can be seen more fully in the world.

Hearing the voice of God and discerning the will of God for ourselves and as a church is not always easy, and in the listening and in the wrestling, I have found one of Thomas Merton's prayers, his Prayer of Unknowing, to be a helpful companion on this life-long journey of discovery, and I'd like to share that with you in closing -

My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think I am following Your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please You does in fact please You.
And I hope I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that, if I do this,
You will lead me by the right road,
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore I will trust You always
though I may seem to be lost
and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for You are ever with me,
and You will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Thanks be to God! Amen.

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