

Did you see the article by Rev Dr Mike Frost in the August/September New Times? It is on page 16/17. The title is “Are you willing to be sent where few can see you?”

After a service where he had preached on God’s call to us an elderly lady in a lavender cardigan bailed him up and told her story. Her husband has advanced Alzheimer’s and is a shell of the man she had loved for most of her life. She said that she used to be angry and yell at God for letting him just lie there and not die. Then it dawned on her that this is God’s calling to her. She looked around and saw others in the same situation and she began praying for them and then speaking with them. Now she is like a pastor to them and her husband. These are the people to whom she has been sent.

Moses was wandering around in the wilderness, minding his own business with his sheep, which he had done for many years. When suddenly something breaks into his day. Fire in a dry land. He turns aside to check things out. Then realises that it is not what he thought. In fact this fire is different – the fire is not burning the bush – real fear of the unknown now takes hold – then a voice speaks to him and tells him to take off his sandals as he is on holy ground – he has entered a sacred space – a place where God is. God has got his attention. God now tells him what he wants him to do. God says that he has seen the plight of the Israelites in Egypt that he has heard their cries and has remembered his promise to their ancestors and is sending Moses to Pharaoh to bring the people out of Egypt to a new land. Just like that. Now this was not exactly the activity that Moses had planned for his old age.

So he thinks up reasons why he should not do this. Who am I to do this? I’m a nobody. - I will be with you. If I do this, the Israelites will ask me what your name is? - My name is I Am who I Am – tell them that “I Am”. If we go beyond today’s lectionary to chapter 4 we find Moses is still trying to evade God’s call. He says, “The people will not believe me. I can’t talk, I am a hopeless public speaker.” – God says, “I will give you the words to say.” God – please don’t send me – at this God gets mad and says – you can take Aaron, your brother, I know he can speak well. Finally Moses accepts God’s call and starts on the road back to Egypt. Moses call changed his life and the course of the history for his people forever.

The Bible is full of stories about God’s call. One story is of Jesus calling to ignorant fisherman and the other to an educated, upper class young man. Jesus’ call comes to them all, like Moses they understood what it meant but they do not all respond the same way. The rich young man turned his back on the way of freedom and “trudged back to the bondage of the past” but the fisherman left all followed Jesus into a future that was to change their lives forever. Little did they know what would happen and where the journey would lead when they took that first step.

God’s call may come when we least expect it, often when we are not looking for it and at any age. Samuel’s call was when he was very young but Moses call came when he was almost 80 – so that gets us all. The church’s call may well be different for every generation or the vision the same but the expression different.

So what for us as a church? Is it the same as for individuals? I suspect that churches too can live the life of an ‘uncalled community’ when they get caught up in things that are only for themselves. For the church as for individuals also God’s call will make sense of what we do, will

hold us fast through tough times, will send us out on mission made possible by God. But this may well be counter cultural – and may well also be counter cultural within church community

At Pilgrim we commit ourselves to responding to God's call to live like Jesus, to be ambassadors for the one who walked the way of the cross and so to represent his values of forgiveness, reconciliation, and peace. To heal the broken, feed the hungry, stand up for the oppressed. And we also acknowledge that the call to non-conformity with the ways of the world includes a call to resist the legitimising of greed, selfishness, infidelity, violence, and exploitation. But it is precisely that refusal to legitimise the very things on which our society is founded which, if really followed through faithfully, will provoke an angry backlash against us.

In last week's lectionary reading in Romans 12: 2 says "Don't let the world around you squeeze you in to its mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands and move towards the goal of true maturity"

This is no easy call. It may sound okay as a religious theory, but to live by it when we are really under threat is as difficult. We have to work at this. We have to allow the Holy Spirit to train us in a new way, in a way that goes against our basic instincts and scandalises and offends our natural sense of justice and decency.

In the gospel reading Peter heard Jesus speak only of the suffering and death that awaited him in Jerusalem. I'm glad, for Peter's sake, that Jesus admitted that this was a stumbling block even to him; that what Peter was saying was difficult even for Jesus to resist.

He acknowledges the almost irresistible appeal of what Peter is suggesting. The Greek word that is translated "stumbling block" here is the same word from which we get our words "scandal" and "scandalise". Jesus is acknowledging that what Peter is advocating is so much a part of normal and obvious common sense and conventional wisdom that any proposal of an alternative scandalises us. It seems not just ridiculous, but offensive and dangerous.

But Jesus is proposing an alternative. He will go to Jerusalem, and in the face of the violent hostility of the authorities there, he will neither fight nor flee. He will resist that most basic of survival instincts and seek another way. But Jesus doesn't just stop at announcing that he will, himself, seek to respond in another way. He goes on to say that anyone who would follow him is also called to resist this most basic survival instinct and to seek another way. "Those who want to save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it."

We need to trust God to hold us when we cannot hold ourselves. We instinctively think that the way of the cross leads only to death, but Jesus sees beyond that. Peter didn't hear it, but Jesus had also said that he would be raised to life on the third day. Jesus saw through the reflex to fight or flee and beyond them to the way that leads not only to the cross, but through the salvation of the cross to the new life in the wide open spaces of God's love and grace.

Let us hear the call, it does not have to be a mammoth task like leading a nation through the desert for 40 years, it may simply be like the call to the elderly lady in the lavender cardigan; to reach out to those around you but together may we allow the Holy Spirit to train us, despite our instincts, in the ways of life.