

## Epiphany 2 Year A

Readings: Isaiah 49: 1 – 7

Psalm 40: 1 – 11

1 Corinthians 1: 1 – 9

John 1: 29 – 42

We, as a liturgical church are in the season of Epiphany. It's a period of several weeks in which we reflect on the manifestation of Christ to all peoples. It is time when we consider the revelation of God's purpose in the world and in our life – when those God-moments bring us to a realisation or

understanding of God and of the relationship between God and ourselves.

The lectionary texts, each in their own way, remind us of the focus of Epiphany. These passages of Scripture speak of the calling by God to bear witness to the presence of God in the world and in the life of people. Though given to those of long ago and from faraway places, people have testified to the presence and work of God throughout the ages; even to folk like you and me in this place and time. It is a call reminding people that we are not alone in this world and that our experience and understanding of life includes something

beyond ourselves; something we may not fully understand, but significant enough to shape our life. God's call is not just about impacting our life alone, it's also about impacting the world and people around us.

In Isaiah 49 we encounter once again the words of this prophet of the Babylonian exile, who speaks of God's divine call to this ministry of witness. Whether the intended recipient of this call is the prophet, Israel, Jesus, or even we who hear the call of God in our own time, the call is to be God's servant. The call has come even before birth.

As is often the case, the prophet protests the call. Yet, here it appears that the prophet feels as if the effort has proven to be in vain – “I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity,” he says. Despite this, the prophet is reminded that God is in this calling and purpose or task. The nature of the task is not just to bring back the survivors of Israel to their ancestral home –that would be too easy, too “light a thing.” Rather, God would gather the people to their homeland so that they might be a light to the nations, so that God’s “salvation shall reach the ends of the earth.” Then, the nations would bow before the Lord and bring glory to God. This is the intent of God, as understood by this prophet, who sees

more for God's people than simply existing as a small country in a big world.

If Isaiah speaks of God's intention to prepare a people to bear witness to God's presence, then the Apostle Paul takes up the issue of how this happens. Paul opens his letter to the Corinthian church whom he speaks of as having been "called to be God's people" in Jesus Christ. Having received this call, they have been "made rich through him in everything." That is, they are not missing any spiritual gifts necessary so that they might bear witness about Christ until the time of his revealing. And this calling, for which they

have been properly gifted or equipped (and Paul talks in great detail later in this letter about the nature of this giftedness), they are “called to partnership with his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” This is an important word, this word about partnership. It’s a reminder that the life of faith isn’t a passive one. It’s not something that we simply let God do to us or through us, but which involves us in active participation. We’re not simply tubes through which God’s love passes through to our neighbours, without any input on our part. God has chosen to use us and to equip us, so that a light might be shared with others.

Finally we reach John's gospel, which revisits Jesus' baptism and calling by John and the calling of the first disciples. This passage from John's Gospel pictures John the Baptist standing with two of his own disciples, and declaring to them: "Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the World!" In making this testimony to Jesus, John submits his own ministry to that of Jesus. His baptism had been one of water, but it was a baptism that prepared the way for the one on whom the Spirit rested. For John, Jesus is the one who came from God and who will restore justice and mercy in the world. John affirms, this is God's Son.

Hearing this testimony, the two disciples leave John and go to Jesus. I'm not sure whether this was John's intent, but the two disciples seemed to understand that if they were going to remain engaged in this work of God, then they would need to attach themselves to the one to whom John had borne witness.

When encountering Jesus, Jesus didn't explain himself to them, he simply invited them – “Come and see.” Their encounter with Jesus was an experience; one in which they would come to make up their own minds about him. Then having made a connection

with Jesus, Andrew, one of these two former disciples of John, goes to his brother, Simon, and bears witness to what he has seen and discovered in Jesus.

At this moment, the profound realisation for Andrew is that “We have found the Messiah.” And when he makes this discovery he feels compelled to share it with his brother Simon. And Simon, himself, feels compelled to come to Jesus. In response, Jesus puts his claim on Simon by giving him a new name – Cephas or Peter. Unlike Matthew, we’re not given Simon’s confession (Matthew 16:16), but obviously in John’s mind, something

happened in this exchange that placed the mantle on this new disciple; one who was called to serve his Lord Jesus Christ.

People's experience of the presence and work God can shape the way they live. It challenges us about how we think and do things as a faith community. As God's people and as the church of Jesus Christ, do we recognise the presence and work of God in the world and in our life? Do we recognise God's calling upon our life? And to what have we been called to testify? What is this calling, and what are the gifts?

Last year, I talked about strategic planning. We had a fantastic time brainstorming in the McLean Room about mission opportunities we might engage with in the near future. While they are wonderful opportunities to testify to the good news of Jesus Christ, somebody has to do it. It is true that mission is God's work in the world, but we as people are part of that world. Like Isaiah, John the Baptist, Andrew and Peter, and the countless believers throughout the ages, God's call upon them was a call to serve; to serve God's purpose. This is a call not just for a few in the church, but for all.

And like the prophets such as Isaiah, the disciples and the early Christian churches, we may feel discouraged and slip up every now and then in our service and testimony to God. We may not even want to accept any call from God. But the point is not that we are imperfect and that we make mistakes, but that in spite of who we are, God uses us nonetheless. This is grace and we serve God in God's grace.

We are all called to serve in one way or another. We can serve God in the life of the church, in our homes, in our neighbourhood, in our work places, schools, community group or whatever and wherever. We are all God's

servants and called to bear witness to this God of grace. We simply invite others to “come and see” and let them experience God for themselves. Amen.