

Angela's Ramblings Epiphany week 2

If you care to look at the readings set for this Sunday, they are from 1 Samuel 3 v 1-10 Revelations 5 v 1-10 and John 1 v 43 to end. You will find that they are all about calling. It is God calling people out, to set them apart, "to accomplish what God intends", to quote a verse in Isaiah. It all sounds very impressive, important, life changing and almost ethereal, almost above us.

However, God's calling comes in many ways. It comes when it is least expected. It may not be what one wants or looked for. When the chief character in "Fiddler on the Roof" shouts to God he says, "I know we are the chosen people but can't you go and choose someone else". I am sure there are many who know how he feels.

I remember when I was training for ordination I did a practical placement at Lakeside Shopping Centre in Thurrock. The person who showed me around this large upmarket, flashy destination shopping centre also took me to one of the adjacent districts to see what the shopping centre had done for them. All the banks had gone, the shops were so much poorer and the whole place seemed forgotten, run down, abandoned and left behind. Equally so were the people who could not afford the likes of Lakeside. When I returned home I expressed in no uncertain terms that I would never wish to be called to that terrible abandoned place or visit it again. Of course when my husband died very shortly after I was given a full time post where I found myself at times ministering to that abandoned place. Needless to say it was not abandoned but was full of God's people who were loving, kind and who welcomed me warmly.

I was working on a dock yard at that time as an Industrial Chaplain. It was then I discovered how truly we in the church give an obscure view of calling. One day a young lady apologised to me for finding her in an office on the docks. She told me that she was a Christian but felt guilty as she knew she ought to be a nurse or teacher but because she had 3 children she could not afford to retrain. I asked her what her job was and it proved to be a very important role within the company. I tried to reassure her that God cared more about her doing her job diligently and meaningfully, not where she was doing it. In that way she was giving God the glory as a witness in that place. A few weeks later, I met her again and she said she was very happy as now without the guilt she could do her job well and love it openly as she had always secretly done. I agree with Malcolm Grundy when in his book "An Unholy Conspiracy", he says to the effect that the person who makes surgical instruments is as important as the one who uses them. The sadness is that we have separated God from the things we do in our ordinary life, but the truth is those things are as important to God as they are to us. God is not just for Sunday.

One day one of my daughters said to me, "Mum why don't you get a job in a nice country parish?" I said, "What do I know about the country I would be lost and hopeless?" Yet so many years later here I am, driving up country lanes, getting stuck with laughing tractor drivers with heads shaking, pulling me out. I am meeting people I never imagined I would meet and being ministered to far more than ministering.

God gives each of us a task no matter how small or large. Sometimes it is easy sometimes it is hard, but each task is important and valuable with God making no one redundant. We are all part of a great jigsaw, each piece important and valuable and each with our own calling to undertake. That is God's gift to us.

But for many of us we cannot get on with our jobs at this very difficult time. There are so many times I have said we are a community, the body of Christ. But that is easy to say but so hard to feel at this time of lockdown. We cannot meet even in the garden let alone the church. We can barely do things for one another let alone follow our calling of service and be community. We are missing our friends and families, many of whom live some distance away. We are in a land we have never been in before, and there are times we are lost.

So what is it that we can do or share? We can pray. We can be joined by prayer, for this is our calling as Christians. We are called to pray for one another and oneself. It is prayer that unites us, holds us and heals us. Just as I discovered in the suffering community next to Lakeside, they were not abandoned by God, they were full of hope. You do not need me, you are as equally

qualified to pray as I am. Just like the young women on the dockyard. She knew her job and enjoyed it. Let us enjoy our prayer life. Neither do we have to do it alone, we can pray on the telephone, via the internet, on Zoom or by some other portal. We can be inventive, imaginative, revolutionary. We can experiment with prayer. We can make God's word come alive. Prayer changes things as one godly lady once told me. It is God's Spirit being made active in us by allowing God to move in us.

By God's grace we are able to pray and God gives us the tools to do it. I truly believe God can use every situation to good. If that is so, let us allow God to use this situation too. Let us come alive and worship with hope and life and see the light of God's goodness.

God bless
Rev Angela