Join God’s journey and help make this world a better place to live in.

Rev’d Dr Elizabeth McWhae

5th Sunday after Epiphany – Isaiah 6:1-8, Psalm 138, Luke 5:1-11, 1 Corinthians 15:1-11

INTRODUCTION:

Before I prepare to write a sermon, I always sit with the readings and see what ideas and themes emerge. This sermon was no exception, but what was unexpected was how quickly the themes presented themselves to me. It was as though they jumped off the page. So let’s see where they take us. I am going to label these themes as 1) sinfulness/brokenness 2) forgiveness/conversion and 3) evangelism/working for God.

POINT 1:

The first reading from Isaiah is a record of his vocational calling as a prophet of Israel. It goes like this. *“Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said:” Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.” Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I, send me!”*

The second reading from 1 Corinthians, is also a record of Paul’s vocational calling as an apostle of Christ. He says this. “*Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to*

me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them – though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."

And finally, the third reading we have Is another vocational calling story, this time from Luke's gospel, and it involves Simon Peter. *Jesus said to Simon, "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long and have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets. When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Then Jesus said to Simon. "Do not be afraid, from now on you will be catching people."*

POINT 2:

Have you noticed there is a clear pattern in these 3 calling stories. And I think they are important to notice, because they tell us something about the Christian journey.

The first experience that Isaiah, Paul and Peter have in their calling stories is one of sinfulness or brokenness. In a profound way, God's presence somehow makes them realise they are damaged human beings, as in fact we all are. And this experience for all 3 of them is utterly overwhelming. It isn't something superficial; it is a realisation that hits them hard to the core of their being.

The second thing that happens to Isaiah, Paul and Peter follows on from their acknowledgement of their sinfulness/brokenness. They mysteriously feel that God has forgiven them. God's grace has somehow altered them so that they think, feel and see things differently. This for them is

an experience of overwhelming forgiveness that could also be understood as their point of conversion if you like. So I am calling this a pattern of forgiveness that leads to conversion to God, to Jesus. It is an awareness that has opened their eyes.

The third pattern I see in Isaiah, Paul and Peter is what I am going to call evangelism or working for God. Each one of them has a radical change in the direction of their lives. Isaiah becomes a prophet. Paul stops persecuting the early christians and instead becomes one himself. And Peter stops being a fisherman and becomes an itinerant preacher and disciple of Jesus. These were not minor changes in their lives, but really significant moves.

POINT 3:

So what can we learn from the experience of Isaiah, Paul and Peter and what can it tell us for our faith journey, as individuals and as a community of faith?

Well, I think we can learn that this pattern of acknowledging our sinfulness/brokenness, which then leads on to forgiveness and conversion to Christ, and is worked out through evangelism and working for God is not optional for our faith journey. Rather it is what our journey is all about. This is what is essential to being a christian. And I don't think this is a once only pattern. I think we constantly need to examine our brokenness, be continually forgiven and converted and work for God in many different ways.

CONCLUSION:

It is not easy being a christian these days or a community of faith, especially one that doesn't have a whole lot of young people, and hip music and black and white ways of understanding the faith. Nevertheless, we are what we are. Recall that Peter was the disciple who denied Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane and Paul, before his Damascus road

experience, was present at the stoning of Stephen. But they both went on to become foundational members of the christian community. So we have no excuses.

The radical change God made in their lives God wants to make in ours. It doesn’t matter if we are young or old. God is not fussed as long as we go on this journey and help to make this world a better place to live in.