



Heart and Soul

Week 2

14 May 2017

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to thank Right Rev Dr Russell Barr, Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, for his thoughts on Heart and Soul.

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Introduction

Given the importance to the Church of Scotland of the *Tomorrow's Calling* initiative, vocation is something I have highlighted during my year as Moderator.

With the help of the Ministries Council, *Red Sky at Night Productions* prepared two short films, one appropriate for use in worship services, the other for school assemblies, and I would be glad to make them available to anyone who would like to use them.

As I have visited the Presbyteries of Lothian, Dunkeld and Meigle, Dumbarton and Gordon, and when I was the guest preacher in other congregations, I have used the films in worship services and school assemblies and spoken on the theme of vocation whenever possible.

I also used the opportunity of the Presbytery visits to meet with enquirers and candidates for the ministry, and to bring together colleagues from various Christian denominations to explore their continuing sense of vocation.

During my week in London I hosted a dinner bringing together people responsible for vocation in the Church of Scotland, Church of England, Roman Catholic Church in England, the United Reformed Church, the Methodist Church and the Presbyterian Church of Wales to share their insights and experiences.

As well as being a rich Biblical theme, vocation resonates with the Reformed tradition of the Church of Scotland, one in which each person is called by God to follow in the way of Christ through the enabling power of the Holy Spirit.

Setting it within the broader context of the ministry of the whole people of God, I have described something of my own vocation as a minister of Word and Sacrament in the hope of encouraging people to consider their sense of God's presence, promise and purpose in their lives.

Scripture passages overview

The two Biblical passages which have provided the foundation for my approach have been Isaiah 6: 1-8 and Luke 5: 1-11.



Although both passages have much in common – the initiative comes from God, Isaiah and Simon Peter are overwhelmed by a sense of their unworthiness; their confession is met with understanding, forgiveness and grace; both Isaiah and Simon Peter are reassured they will not face the task alone but always in the presence and strength of God – the fact one passage is set in the context of worship while the other is centred on the work place suggested a variety of settings in which God’s presence and purpose can be encountered.

Personal

Although I am always a little diffident about introducing too much personal material into my preaching – the focus of preaching ought to be God and not the preacher – it seemed to me important to be able to say something about my own sense of God’s presence and purpose in my life which led to my vocation as a minister of Word and Sacrament. In particular I wanted to highlight the role of other people who saw in me something which it took a while for me to recognise in myself, and whose encouragement changed the journey of my faith and life.

Below is an outline of how I tried to weave the Biblical teaching and personal experience together.

Sermon ideas

People have often asked me if I always wanted to be a minister – perhaps it is because they thought I couldn’t get a proper job – but the honest answer is growing up in Ayrshire what I wanted to be was a professional golfer.

Rather than wanting to be a minister, I felt called to become a minister and that sense of vocation and calling is something I want to speak about this morning.

From the Hebrew scripture we heard of the dramatic calling of the prophet Isaiah.

As the narrative unfolds the scene is one of royal majesty, a heavenly palace, as Isaiah is given a glimpse behind the scenes of God attends to the affairs of state.

Set in the year of King Uzziah’s death, probably 736 BC, it proves to be a terrifying experience for Isaiah.



Confronted by the glory and majesty of the heavenly court, Isaiah is overwhelmed by a sense of his own unworthiness.

He is a man of unclean lips living among a people of unclean lips – and to make matters worse Isaiah has now seen God and will surely die.

Rather than death however to Isaiah's surprise a seraph touches a coal to his lips cleansing them and removing his guilt.

And to his greater surprise Isaiah hears the voice of the Lord asking whom he should send.

Isaiah was already a man of faith but his spiritual journey was about to take him in a new and unexpected direction.

It was not a direction he sought, or one he thought he deserved, but I want you to notice God met Isaiah's confession with understanding and forgiveness.

In other words, Isaiah's calling came not because he was particularly good or powerful or holy or wise but was born of God's goodness and grace.

What was true for Isaiah is, I believe, true for us all.

Whoever you are, are you here in church today because you have always served God faithfully and well?

Do you suppose for a moment I am the Moderator because I have always lived a good and perfect life?

Of course not - and while I don't want to suggest you are all miserable sinners with no redeeming qualities whatsoever, I do want to say that the Christian journey of faith and life is itself a sign and gift of God's grace.

Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?

Looking back I realise the role other people played in awakening my sense of calling.

There were the Sunday School teachers at my home church in Kilmarnock.

There was the captain of the 1st Kilmarnock Boys Brigade who asked me to read the Bible at the annual church parade and then to lead the Sunday morning Bible class.



There was a history teacher at Langside College in Glasgow who took me under his wing and, well after I had left school to pursue my dream of being a golfer, opened up the possibility of going to university.

And there was my minister, the late John Weir Cook, whose preaching on the grace of God was quite inspirational.

Rather than any thunderbolts from heaven, or even a moment of blinding conversion like Paul on the Damascus Road, my spiritual journey involved a gradual awakening of my faith, a growing sense of God's presence and purpose in my life, and God's calling me into ministry.

Given my experience, and in particular the role other people played in awakening my sense of vocation, let me ask if ministry is something you have ever considered?

Would you be interested in finding out more about the various ministries of the church?

Or is there someone you would encourage to think about ministry, someone in whom you recognize a potential which perhaps they don't recognize in themselves?

Simon Peter was one such person.

As he was attending to his nets that fateful morning on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee, do you suppose Simon Peter had any thought of becoming a disciple?

Or did he simply want to get home after a poor night's fishing?

The gospels tell us a lot about Simon Peter.

He was the one whose boat Jesus borrowed.

He was the one who fell on his knees when the boat filled with fish.

He was the one who protested loudly when Jesus first spoke about Jerusalem.

He was the one who offered to build shelters on the Mount of Transfiguration.

He was one of the ones who fell asleep in the Garden of Gethsemane.

He was the only one to follow when Jesus was arrested.

He was the one who denied knowing Jesus.



He was one of those who ran and saw an empty tomb that first Easter morning.

He was the one who recognized the stranger's voice when they went back home fishing.

He was the one Jesus told to feed his lambs and take care of his sheep.

He was the one who addressed the crowd on the day of Pentecost.

He was the one who healed the crippled beggar at the Temple gate

From a morning spent mending his nets Simon Peter's journey was nothing short of remarkable - yet isn't it true to say every person's journey of faith is nothing short of remarkable.

Whether or not God gives us a new name, God gives each of us a new life, bringing to birth a new purpose and creating a fresh hope because then or now, the calling of God is never a calling to stand still, think the same, believe the same, live the same.

It is always a call to learn and grow and be led into new experiences of God's presence and promise in the world and our place within it.

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying,

'Whom shall I send?

And who will go for us?

Although my heart was once set on becoming a professional golfer, not for a second would I wish my life back again.

My sense of vocation remains as strong now as it ever did and the work of ministry remains as varied and demanding as it is frustrating, challenging, enjoyable and rewarding.

And through the opportunity it gives me to share God's love and the hopes and promises of the Christian faith with people in some of the best and some of the worst times of life, it is a privilege beyond words.

It is of course but one part of the ministry in which we all share, the ministry of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, who calls us to follow and in whom each one of us has the opportunity to respond;

Here am I Lord, send me!



Time with Children

One of the questions children are often asked concerns what they would like to be when they grow up.

However rather than having them tell you the answer, make a little game out of it and see if you can guess.

Then have them guess what you thought you would like to be when you were their age!

Drawing upon your own life experience, and using one or two Biblical examples, lead the children to see that as much as they might (or might not) have ideas and plans for their life, God also has ideas and plans.

Prayers

Call to prayer

Praise the Lord O my soul and forget not all His benefits
 who forgives all Your sins.....and crowns You with love and compassion
(Psalm 103: 2, 3, 6)

To this place of worship
 we are drawn by the promise of Your presence and promise

To this holy place
 we gather to listen to Your Word
 searching for a greater understanding about ourselves
 and a deeper truth about the world in which we live

To this moment of quiet reflection we open our hearts and minds
 to bring You our hopes, our dreams, our doubts and disappointments
 and to seek a richer and fuller way of life for ourselves and all creation

God of grace
 in humble reverence we bow before You



and with the Psalmist we praise Your name
and bless You for continuing goodness and concern.

Yet with the Psalmist we also recall
that if You were to treat us as our sins deserve
and to repay us according to our iniquities
then we would be lost and without hope.

Just as a father has compassion on his children
we dare to believe You have compassion on us

And so with sorrow we confess to living in a world You created to be good
but one we have made sad by human greed and hatred
a world rich in resources yet one in which prosperity is enjoyed by some
and poverty endured by many
And we also acknowledge our personal failures of love and friendship,
the hurt we have caused, the disappointment we have created
and the opportunities we have missed.

Merciful God, trusting in Your mercy and in the sacrifice once made for us at Calvary
we pray the forgiveness that is Your gift

(pause)

May the God of love and mercy forgive you and set you free from all your sin
Jesus said, Arise, go in peace, your faith has made you whole.

Almighty God,

Your Son Jesus Christ is the way, the truth and the life.

Give us grace to love one another and walk in the way of his commandments,
who lives and reigns with You and the Holy Spirit,
and in whose name we are glad to pray

Our Father



Prayers of thanksgiving and intercession

Our lives are lived in Your presence
our souls are held in Your care
and there is much for which we would thank You

From the earth bursting with the new life of spring
to the vast and mysterious depths of the universe
we would thank You for the wonder of creation

From life and love shared with family and friends
to the priceless gifts of good health and strength
we would thank You for our daily bread

From this time of worship and prayer
to Your calling us into the life of the church
and for the people who down through the years
have sung Your praise
listened for Your word
trusted in Your promises
and walking in Christ's way of the cross
and shown us what it means to live with faith
we would thank You

Grant us the grace to love what You command
and to desire what You promise
that in all the changes and chances of life
our hearts may be surely fixed
where true joys are to be found
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

God of the poor
often we wonder why in a world of plenty
there is such grinding poverty



Friend of the weak

often we despair that in a world of great opportunity
so many endure violence and bloodshed

Give us compassion

and hear us as we pray for those who pay the price of human folly
the victims of poor leadership and flawed government
of unjust trading agreements and corrupt practices
those made refugee by war
all who face a day of hunger and misery

We thank You for Christian Aid

and pray that the money raised during Christian Aid week will be put to good use
finding beauty in brokenness
creating hope from despair and havens from fear

God of majesty

Christ is the King and head of the Church

We pray for the Church of Scotland meeting next Saturday in General Assembly
and pray Your gifts of wisdom and compassion for Derek Browning nominated as Moderator.

Bless too with insight and understanding

the ministers and elders and delegates gathered from around the world
and lead them to discern something of Your will and purpose for the church today.

As we remember those who awakened our faith

and drew us into the life of the Church,
help us draw other people to Christ
awakening in them to his invitation to follow

Lord Jesus Christ

shelter for fragile lives



we hold in our hearts and prayers
 all facing difficult and testing times
 those whose employment is threatened
 those whose hearts are troubled
 those whose love has been betrayed
 those whose memory is failing
 those whose health is poor
 and all who have been bereaved
 God of time and eternity
 from sunrise to sunset let Your kingdom increase
 until Your justice burns brightly
 the nations learn of Your ways
 people seek Your salvation
 and all creation sings You its hymn of praise
 Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost
 as it was in the beginning, is now and shall be for evermore.
 Amen

Musical suggestions

CH4 does not have a specific section on Vocation but I have found the following helpful

CH4 81	I too the hills
CH4 96	You are before me, God, you are behind
CH4 192	All my hope on God is founded
CH4 251	I the Lord of sea and sky
CH4 510	Jesus call us here to meet him
CH4 527	Lord, make us servants of your peace
CH4 530	One more step
CH4 533	Will you come and follow me
CH4 542	Lord, speak to me that I may speak



Additional Resources

Pray Now is designed to be a starting point for what you might look for in prayers. *Word of Life* will be launched at this year's [Heart and Soul](#) event and is available for pre-order from [St Andrew Press](#).



SPIRITUALITY OF CONFLICT

The [Spirituality of Conflict](#) website publishes reflections on the Sunday gospel readings in the 3-year lectionary cycle of the church. The reflections explore the themes of conflict within the gospels and offer questions and commentary for private reading, group discussions and public worship. Whilst most of the content will be connected to the Revised Common Lectionary, some will relate to occasions throughout the year – everything from St Patrick's Day to World AIDS Day. All of the content is free to download, use and share with others.

[Quick Guides](#) are designed to help people with the various elements of leading worship, gathering community and ordering space.

Quick Guide...

You may wish to email these three links to the people reading Scripture on Sunday to support them in their involvement in worship: [Managing your nerves](#); [Creative readings](#); [Worship at the Lectern](#)



[Resourcing Mission](#) is host to Starters for Sunday archive material and other key mission resources for download and purchase. Online booking is available for [Mission & Discipleship events](#).

The Mission and Discipleship Council would like to express its thanks to the Rev Dr Russell Barr for providing us with this material.

Please note that the views expressed in these materials are those of the individual writer and not necessarily the official view of the Church of Scotland, which can be laid down only by the General Assembly.

