

What are you for?

Isaiah 6¹⁻⁸; Psalm 138; 1 Corinthians 15¹⁻¹¹; Luke 5¹⁻¹¹

The Lord shall make good his purpose for me [Psalm 138⁸]

Conversations between strangers can be fairly predictable: name; what you do; family; perhaps hobbies; weather! What if we began with the question, 'What are you for? What is your purpose?' How would you respond.

That's what we have in the readings for today:

- ✠ We heard from Isaiah. He had that great theophany and vision of heaven and eavesdropped on the Seraphim as they flew around heaven shouting loud enough so that **the pivots of the thresholds shook** and constantly remind those who hear about who God is: **Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of his glory.** Unremarkably, against that backdrop, Isaiah felt inadequate and knew that those who saw God died: **woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips... yet my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!** Forgiveness is proffered in the symbol of the hot coal touching his lip - **your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.** This was followed by the call: **whom shall I send and who will go for us?** And then the response: **Here am I, send me!**

Isaiah reminds me of that old joke about Noah: God says to Noah, 'will you build me an ark?' 'Yes, Lord! Just one thing - what's an ark?' He says yet to being sent and to going, but at this stage he doesn't know what he is signing up for.

That is faith - to say yes without knowing what you are saying yes to. That can happen, and can only happen, when our response is to God and grows out of our worship.

- ✠ The Psalmist has faith that grows because he worships God. He celebrates his faithfulness; he has experience of God's help in trouble; he knows that God has a **good purpose** for him.
- ✠ Paul is just about to launch into the great chapter 15 of his 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, expressing clearly his confidence in the resurrection of Jesus (and we shall have this for the next few weeks).

What becomes clear is that Paul knew what he was for. His identity is dependent on his relationship with the Risen Christ: **last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared to me. For I am the least of the Apostles.** His whole existence, his reason for being is predicated on that moment of encounter with Jesus. He is confident in this - **by the grace of God, I am what I am.**

What Paul makes explicit is that, while we cannot ever earn God's grace, we can respond to it: **his grace to me has not been in vain... I worked harder than any of them.** Why? **So we proclaim and so you have come to believe.**

- ✠ The Gospel has the calling of the fishermen: a poor night of fishing means that they are hesitant to obey Jesus when he tells them to get back out there. When they do **they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break.** Simon knows how to respond: **Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.** What happens next is the invitation to fish for people and it simply records, **when they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.**

That first encounter, the awe at Jesus, the recognition of ones' own unworthiness gave way to three years of apprenticeship and then a lifetime building the Church and then being martyred so that Simon Peter's blood seals his ministry as an Apostle.

So, what are you for? We celebrate the freedom we have in worship and receive God's forgiveness, but then the task of going for him is still ours to pick up. It is our privilege, joy and responsibility to share our faith.

It is easy for me: I have always known what I was for. I don't say that for any reason but, with Paul, to recognise that **by the grace of God, I am what I am.** When, at the age of two, my grandparents forgot to pick us up for Church my twin sister and I toddled round the corner and hammered on the door to be let in. At the age of three I threatened that sister with a plastic giraffe if she didn't sit still and listen to the sermon I was delivering. When in adult life I tried to wriggle out of pastoral responsibility, God didn't let me go. God in his accuse sense of fun brought us together - and now you are what I am for!

So, what are you for? Relax into his call on your life and find it to be far less frightening than it is fulfilling and liberating.