

St Peter's, Ealing
Sunday 31st January 2021
Candlemas Sunday

In the Judeo-Christian story of salvation there so many odd choices of people who do not seem to fit, who we would never have gotten past an interview panel.

Moses, a ne'er-do-well spoilt rich boy who oversteps his authority and runs away to the desert to herd sheep. This is no hero. This is a dolt. He admits himself, when God calls and tells him what he must do for the people of Israel, he is not up to the task, there are better choices.

Samson, another spoilt fool, a bully and a show-off to boot. David, the lowest member of the lowest family of the lowest tribe. A shepherd given the most menial tasks. Look at the prophets; Amos, Hosea, whiney old Jeremiah. I doubt very much if any of these individuals would have made it through a ministry selection programme.

Yet all of these and many more besides were called to take their place in the story of salvation – all were unimaginable choices.

Then we have this young couple who today are fulfilling the Mosaic law, presenting their first born son to God in the Temple. Another odd couple really; young country folk from the rural backwaters of occupied Israel whose story is a little more than bizarre: visited by angels with messages from God, forced to live in a barn with angelic messages from shepherds they had never met and visits from philosophers who themselves had interpretations of stars and texts that would be difficult to stomach at the best of times. Simeon and Anna had no idea of this back story and yet they, an old man and an eccentric hermit come out to proclaim the child the Saviour of the world.

In standing back from this story for a moment this whole salvation story makes no sense if only from the selection of anti-heroes, misfits and round pegs in square holes drawn into it. Fr Adam and I were discussing this only last week in the context of priesthood and parish life. One of the things a priest must be ready for is not fitting into their parish, being that round peg in a square hole.

Initially we apply to and take parishes for various reasons, soon we discover we are not a perfect fit.

The thing is, like Moses, Samson, David, Amos, Hosea, Mary & Joseph we are responding to Gods call upon us. God's call upon our lives is not to be a perfect fit, but to serve and proclaim.

This is the nature of the Christian life. God sees in us potentials and skills, abilities and promises. They rarely result in a neat fit but they are what a given situation or job requires, although that may not be immediately obvious. Then you add this into the life of the church community. I wonder how many of us would even have known each other if it was not for that one thing that unites us, our faith. God has called us to worship together here. Here we bring skills and abilities, potentials and promises; all drawn together for the building up of God's church and the sharing of God's good news. we may not feel up to it or sufficiently skilled but that is why we are here.

God's call upon Mary & Joseph or you and me is not to fit into a place or a time but to respond to God's call upon us. Mary was amazed when Gabriel told her what God had in store for her. Moses had to be given the miracle of a burning bush before he listened to God. God's call is upon each of us; we may not feel up to the job, we may not feel we fit or we belong but that is not the point. It is about hearing God's word for us and responding positively. It is about what God needs us to do for God's work.

I may not fit in to St Peter's. That is not the point. What is the point is why God has called me to be here. You may feel the same way about your place or part, here or in the wider community or your place of work, but that is not important. What is important is you are responding to God's call in your heart, God's vision for you and how you respond – and that is true for us all.

At Candlemas we mark Mary & Joseph's answering Gods call of service, of caring for His son. In presenting their first born son to God Mary & Joseph are positively responding to God and God's call upon their lives.

At our baptism we too are presented to God, commissioned as his followers to live the Christian life. We are not selected for our suitability, we are received

for our potential to receive God's love. We too are encouraged to respond to God's call upon our lives.

If we were in church today we would be gathering around the font with lit candles where we would commit ourselves to the story of Jesus and prepare ourselves for the Lenten journey ahead of us, rededicating ourselves to God recognising God doesn't call the tailored, finished product, he calls the misfits to do His will and proclaim His truth in all the world.

©The Revd David Neno 31.1.21