

As decent human beings we spend a lot of time thinking about other people, co-operating with them, trying to help them, having concern for them and, sometimes, getting thoroughly cross or fed-up with them. Just for a few minutes this morning, we're not going to do that. I want you to be thoroughly selfish, and think about yourself.

'Lord, you have searched me out and known me', says the first verse of Psalm 139 which we've just sung. God knows me. Not in a vague general way as a reasonably typical member of the genus *Homo sapiens* – God knows me – me, Margaret, me, Harry, me, Julia, me: insert your name here. God has searched me out. He looked particularly for me, and he knows me. He created me, so perhaps I shouldn't be surprised that he has some basic information from way back when, but he's still in touch, still interested, still concerned. He knows what I do and what I say, even before I do it. And it doesn't matter where I go – he will be there, wherever it is, to guide and protect me. (That bit wasn't in what we sang this morning, but it's there in the whole psalm, and it's important.)

What's more, I am unique and I am marvellously made. I am a marvel. All of me – even the bits I'm not so keen on. I don't understand how this thing that is 'me' actually works. People have studied every aspect of the human being for centuries, and still have very little idea of what is going on. But God knows. He is acquainted with all my ways. It is quite extraordinary that God knows me, and goes on knowing me, in this way. As he does you, too. What's more, he knows that his creation is good, and he loves it. He loves each of us, quite specifically, as ourselves. How he does it, we don't know. But it's a powerful thought for when life gets tough. 'You have searched me out and known me.' Wherever I am: 'Your hand shall lead me and your right hand shall hold me.'

But what he doesn't do is insist, or dictate. We know how he would like us to behave, but the choice is ours. We can ignore him, hide, blank him out, tell people that we've got nothing to do with him – even that he doesn't exist. It makes not one iota of difference. God is still there, still knowing, and still guiding and protecting, which brings us to the idea of 'calling', which is such a strong theme in today's readings.

It's easy to feel that God's call ought to be to a very specific, holy and probably almost impossible way of life. Samuel's call was to be a prophet. Philip and Nathaniel were to be disciples. We speak about people being called to religious life, or having a vocation (which just means 'calling') to nursing, teaching or missionary work. The stories we were told and the examples we were given as children were about truly exceptional people who did quite extraordinary deeds. If we're not careful we feel rather cheated – a bit let down – because we don't seem to have experienced that sort of calling ourselves. We end up disparaging ourselves and the things we do because we are just not in the same league as Mother Teresa or St. Francis, so we're obviously not any of those special, called, people.

But God made a very complex world and he needs all sorts of people in it. A world full of priests, missionaries and nuns would be woefully incomplete. This world needs farmers and electricians, accounts clerks and street cleaners, shop assistants, social workers, grandmothers and bus drivers. It even needs politicians, estate agents and journalists. It needs people who read and think, people who organise, people who do very practical jobs and people who make decisions. God has searched you out; he knows you and he has called you to be who you are, where you are, doing what you're doing

now. If at some point that begins to feel uncomfortable, maybe he wants you to think about change, or maybe he wants you to stick with it because something positive will emerge from the difficulties. He knows you, and the best way to get a steer as to what to do next, or to be reassured that you're in the right place, or to get some comfort and support if life is truly bleak, is to get in touch with him and listen to what he wants to tell you.

One of the early Church Fathers, a bishop called Irenaeus, wrote: 'The glory of God is man fully alive.' We'll forgive him the second-century language and rewrite him slightly: 'The glory of God is a human fully alive.' If you go from day to day doing what's in front of you, noticing the people around you, helping them out when you can, being a cheerful and constructive part of the family, taking time to notice the good things in the world, and if you remember to keep in touch with God through prayer and with thanksgiving, you are responding to his call. You are a human who is fully alive, and you are living to his glory.