

Who does God call?

‘But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of him who called you out of darkness into his marvellous light.’

1 Peter 2.9

God’s call to humanity begins with **creation**. To be made – uniquely – in the divine image and likeness is to be called for a purpose, for God and in relationship to God (Genesis 1.26–28; cf. Genesis 2.15). We live in God’s world, and, wherever we go, God is present, and God is at work, calling us to fulfilment by sharing in that work. Yet from the beginning, the human race has listened to other voices and turned away from God’s will.

For the sake of all humanity, now marked by sin and death, God calls a **people**: to belong to him, to proclaim his praise and to serve him in holiness (Exodus 19.6; 1 Peter 2.9). This calling comes as a gift from God that we receive together in baptism, alongside those who have gone before us and those who will come after us. We are called to be part of God’s people in our generation, to share in its

common life and common task, for the sake of the world.

The life of God’s people is characterized by freedom: we belong together because we have been liberated by God’s grace, to proclaim God’s mighty acts. In the words of the Song of Zechariah (the Benedictus) from Luke 1.68–79 (traditionally used at Morning Prayer), we give thanks day by day that God has set us free: ‘Free to worship him without fear, holy and righteous in his sight all the days of our life.’

The word translated ‘worship’ here also means ‘serve’ in a more general sense. Worship is the service we offer in addressing the one who has delivered us, and witness is the service we offer in our interaction with other people, including those who do not yet know God’s ‘marvellous light’. The two are inseparable from one another: in our worship, we witness



Seven days a week

A bookshop owner, a station worker, an auditor, a law student and a scaffolder walk into a church...

No, not the start of a joke but five stories from individuals who are beginning to find out more of what it means for them to be called to serve God in their daily lives. Add hairdresser, primary carer, radiographer, comedian, football coach, police officer and well, whatever you do, and this is the church – the people called by God in an ordinary, extraordinary way.

Melanie says this of her role in a bookshop: 'Bookshops are a special kind of place, where we can feel at home or safe, and find hospitality and welcome. So the bookseller can become a friend and confidant. I am privileged and blessed to share times of great joy and great sadness with many people as they come in for books or cards. I consider my job a faith vocation. I live out my faith through my job, through the groups I'm active in and the conversations I have. So, I do church seven days a week.'

to God's saving action, and in our witness, we invite all to share in worship of the one saviour (cf. Isaiah 43.8–21). We are set free to serve God in worship and witness 'all the days of our life' – not just on Sundays, not just at special moments or when we meet with other Christians, but every day, every moment.

God calls us as a **people**, and God calls each one of us. Within the common calling of God's people, every

person has a unique calling. In the Gospels, we see people responding to God's call in Christ in different ways, as Jesus asks different things of them.

In responding to God's call and finding our place among God's people, we accept commitments that mark us in deep and lasting ways. We can refer to acceptance of such life-shaping commitment as a calling, or a **vocation**, that we receive from God. Vocations can be of different kinds, and we may

have more than one at a time.

Christians have used the language of vocation to talk about three intersecting areas: work, relationships and ministry. Accepting a commitment to a specific occupation, profession or sphere of work in response to God's call, to share in God's work in God's world, becomes a vocation. So does accepting a commitment to another person in marriage and family life, or to a religious community or to celibacy.

So does accepting a commitment to serve the church in a lifelong ministry, or in a specific place.

Paul stresses in his description of the church as Christ's body that each of us receives gifts from God, and none should be singled out as intrinsically superior to others (Romans 12.3–8; 1 Corinthians 12.4–31). Similarly, the diversity of vocations in the church should not be turned into a hierarchy but rather affirmed and celebrated.

Meeting God underground

It's true to say that our relationship with God isn't dependent on what we do.

However, this doesn't mean that what we do isn't of interest to God, or that what we do can't be used by God. Remmie works for London Underground in customer support and interacts with thousands of customers every day. He says: 'When I do my job I put God first and He directs me what to do and say with all my customers – they can see this in me.'

Working for London Underground has its challenges when things go wrong. 'When things go wrong the public go bananas. I let them know we are doing all we can and I give them alternative ways to travel, and ideas to get where they are going'. Key to surviving when it is busy is being secure in the knowledge that God is always with him. 'When I have little time, I think through Psalms which I have learnt. This gives me courage and the extra instinct to do what God wants.'



The Protestant Reformers of the sixteenth century sharply challenged the assumption that vocations to priestly ministry or religious community were superior to vocations to everyday occupations or family life.

In the Church of England's **Book of Common Prayer** (1662), the Second Collect for Good Friday expresses this very clearly:

Almighty and everlasting God, by whose Spirit the whole body of the Church is governed and sanctified: Receive our supplications and prayers, which we offer before thee for all estates of men in thy holy Church, that every member of

the same, in his vocation and ministry, may truly and godly serve thee; through our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

The idea that every member of the church has a vocation within the common calling of God's people for the common good is very powerful – and challenging too. It is vital in the contemporary context of the Church of England that we uphold it and explore its implications together. Only in the wonderful variety of individual vocations – to work (paid or unpaid), to relationships, to ministry – can the common calling of the church be fulfilled.

Where's God at work?

Finding a sense of vocation isn't easy. We might never feel a 'this is what I was made for' moment. Perhaps a sense of vocation starts with thinking about how we undertake the roles and commitments we have.

Anne-Marie is an internal auditor in retail. Part of her job involves disciplinary interviews and, if necessary, dismissing people from the company. 'As a Christian I feel compassion for these people, and I feel very sorry for them. Out of all the cases I've dealt with all bar one has been desperation. I have to do my job and I have to sack these people, but what I can also do as I escort them from the premises is to give them a leaflet for CAP (Christians Against Poverty) so they have someone they can talk to as I personally can't help them.'



God at work, through me

Whatever we do for our 'work', God is at work in our lives, often through the gifts and personality we have.

Thomas, a college student, reckons God is at work in his everyday life through being an approachable friend. As he puts it, 'Every now and then people walk up to me and talk to me. Because I make myself open to be the one that people talk to.' Victoria, a trainee hairdresser, finds God at work through prayer. Every time she washes someone's hair, she prays a blessing for them. For Beatrice, a political researcher and law student, God works through the values she seeks to live by: 'I try to put God and others before myself, often easier said than done!'

God at work, everywhere

Gary, a scaffolder, says that his work isn't a very Christian environment.

'For me, it's changed me in the way I react. That's a massive thing. To try and bring God into the workplace through people that I give jobs to. Ex-offenders, people from the street, that kind of stuff. It's changed me in that way. I have a lot of employees and family members who say, "Why do you bother?" Because a lot of the time it doesn't go right, but it's because of God. In the office, if I get in a little bit earlier than what I should do, I listen to a bit of worship music and people come in and say, "What are you listening to?" I'm not shy about it. I get a great opportunity to speak to customers as well. In the old days if there was no business it would be a stressful time and I would be quite short and angry and whatever. Now, obviously, through having the faith, I'm learning to pray and give it to God. And I've had some amazing answers to prayers. I mean, on the spot, when there was no work, then finish the prayer and the phone rings and the jobs come in. I would say for me that God wants everyone to be saved. In that it's my opportunity as a believer of being saved to giving other people opportunity. So, for me, my way of trying to be representing God in my workplace and make a difference is to give these people opportunities to work.'

It's your call?

So how do we begin to think about our calling?

Amanda, who describes her main call as being a mum mainly based at home, says: 'I guess one of the things that is crucially important is to know that I'm loved by God, because I suppose there's not a lot of social capital or status given to mums who are at home, not paid. Who I am is valuable and worthy of God's love. Out of that flows, I suppose, a security and a freedom to be who I am and hopefully to offer that love and acceptance and freedom to other people. So hospitality is a key part of how I see myself working out my faith, hospitality in the broadest sense of the term, I guess, that sort of generosity of the heart and a willingness to welcome people who aren't like ourselves into our own space, particularly people who don't perhaps have family here. There are lots of people who don't have family nearby.'

Questions for reflection:

- **How do you feel about the perspective that everyone has a calling?**
- **Where do you think God is active in your daily life?**
- **Ask some of your friends at church, or elsewhere, if they have ever thought about how God might be involved in their daily life?**

Do try this at church:

Many of the stories in this booklet come from a practice known as This Time Tomorrow. It's a simple thing that can be run in a church service or gathering.

There are three basic questions:

- **What will you be doing tomorrow?**
- **What are the challenges and opportunities you face as a Christian?**
- **How can we pray for you?**

Not only will this help to get to know people a little better, it helps to affirm that we are all called by God in some way in our everyday.