

# Sermon

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May I speak in the name of the Holy and Blessed Trinity, one God in three persons.

Amen.

God calls. It's what God does. At the very dawn of time God called the world into being and has been doing so ever since. Not only that, but God calls each one of us into life. If there is one thing we can trace all the way through the Bible it is simply this – God calls us and loves us into being.

This morning's Gospel reminds us beautifully of this theme. In it Jesus paints a picture of a shepherd calling to the sheep. It's an image that would have been very well known to Jesus's original audience if less so to us. When I was a student I lived in the Holy Land for a while and one day went out to camp overnight in the Sinai desert. We were with some Bedouins who as night drew in gathered all their sheep together in a single pen. At dawn the teenage boys who took care of the sheep came, there were about 5 of them and they all called at once. The sheep immediately filed out of the pen and gathered in groups around each of the boys. The sheep knew which of the shepherds was their shepherd and gathered around them ready to be led out to find pasture for the day.

I think about this every time I hear this passage. It is so simple and yet so powerful. Jesus, our shepherd calls us, and notice he doesn't just call us with any old shout like the shepherd boys do. Jesus calls us by name and we, hearing his call know that we are loved. As this is John's Gospel we cannot help when we read this passage but remember Mary in the garden after Jesus's resurrection who was devastated at the loss of all her hopes and dreams. Jesus had died and then to make it even worse his body had disappeared. As she stood, heartbroken and weeping in the garden, Jesus called her by name and at that moment she knew not only that the person had she had thought was a gardener was Jesus himself but that she was known and loved by Jesus the Good Shepherd.

When we think about calling, then, right at its heart is the simple message of love. Jesus knows us and loves us and calls us to live life abundantly, as John 10.10 puts it. First and foremost, we are called simply to be, and in that being to know that we are loved.

But then we are called to live out that love in the world – to feed the sheep. For some of us this will involve simply going about our daily lives with love - like Robert driving buses, or Matt caring for people as a paramedic; for others it will take the form of feeling called to a particular form of ministry in the church or in the local community.

For some living out our calling will take place as we nurture those in our own home; for others this will happen as we care for people in our wider society and world. God's call to love is the same but it takes infinitely different forms in the lives of each one of us.

One of the really interesting things in the Bible is to notice the variety of callings that people receive. Sometimes they are called to a lifetime of serving God at other times people are called to do a very specific thing, like delivering a message to a particular group of people. What comes through the whole Bible is that God calls and calls and calls. Telling us that we are loved and asking us to pour out that very love in every way we can on those around us.

At times like this when our world feels turned upside down living out our callings can be really hard. All those things we knew we used to be called to feel at best fragile and at worst impossible. The ways we normally did things have fallen away and we are left feeling uncertain and often useless.

At times like this all we can do is to listen again to the voice of the God who calls, reminding us that we are loved with a love beyond measure, calling us by name and asking us to pour out this great love in any and every way we can.

Amen.