

## Bennochy church: 21st August 2016

Some people believe that they were destined for greatness. From noble birth or plucked from obscurity and placed on the centre stage of history. For others, greatness finds them, and they became reluctant heroes. There are those whose names are etched across the annals of history; names known from their exploits on the battle field, or the political or sporting arenas. Other heroes you need to dig deep to find, they are not famous, but their lives just as significant. History is remembered in people of action and people of words. What indeed is mightier, the swords or the pens of history?

Part of the book of Hebrews is about the heroes of the faith. The writer says this;

*"Be careful, then, and do not refuse to hear him who speaks."*  
(Hebrews 12: 25)

What all these heroes had in common was this, their obedience to the voice of God. The call, was always God's initiative. It made me think, how often we hear, but fail to listen? Words that do not penetrate the soul. A superficial acknowledgment of what we hear, but it does not confirm in our hearts and in our minds, the call of God.

Yet, call is central to so many of the stories of faith. Jesus said to the early disciples, *"come, follow me"*. To the prophet Jeremiah he said, *"I chose you before I gave you life."*

How do we understand this idea of being called by God? Jeremiah is called to be a prophet, and immediately he begins to make excuses. "No way! You have got the wrong man. I can't be a prophet. I don't have the experience. I can't speak and anyway, I am far too young!" What do they say in sport, *if you are good enough, your old enough!* Jeremiah heard God's call, but he wasn't listening. I don't believe we hear voices in our heads. My understanding is that the spirit of God, nudges us. Our minds are challenged in a particular way as our hearts are inspired. We begin to ask, what is God saying to me?

I want to suggest that in one sense, this idea of call is actually the easy bit. Read the stories of the prophets and see what they had to endure later on, in putting their call into practice. When the 'rubber hit the road', they had to persevere in the face of danger, challenging the powerful people of their day. How many times, I wonder, did they just want to give up and go home. I have had enough. How many times did they ask, OK God, where are you? I am not feeling much protection at the moment. These prophets were in constant fear of their lives.

It is hard to constantly go against the flow. It saps energy and drains our spirit. Did the disciples of Jesus ever think, that's it, let's go home to Galilee and leave this guy to do his own thing. There must have been times when they thought like that. After all, they were just ordinary men. And what about the crushing

blow of Jesus death. The time and energy they had invested in this man. Did they ever say, it's over, and what was the point of him asking us to follow. Surely, the journey ends here. What I saying is this, being called by God is tough. The road ahead is unknown and unmapped.

Maybe the greatest example is that of Paul. Think what happened to him. The Damascus road was the easy bit! He was attacked by crowds, his life was in constant danger, he was shipwrecked, imprisoned and beaten up. God makes it clear to Jeremiah, this will not be easy. Your task, speak against my people. Tell them what they do not wish to hear. Speak what I command, and do not be afraid. In other words, prepare for battle.

Here is the challenge for us, and there is no easy answer to this. How does the idea of God's call, as experienced by Jeremiah, relate to us? Is God's call only a biblical experience. It was good for the likes of Jeremiah and Paul! Is it only for others or, does it come down to how we are listening to God.

None of us like taking that first step into the unknown, but that is what faith is all about. It is a journey that moves us from being settled to being a pilgrim people for God. Most people do not have a natural instinct towards that which is new or different, and when we do get out onto the road, we need a special kind of perseverance, that enables us to run the race to the end. To stop us turning back to that which we know, and to keep us

walking in the way of Jesus. Our call from God begins the journey.

If Jeremiah believed he could not speak, we are told God then stretched out his hand and touched his mouth. A symbolic act and sign that God would be with him in the task he had been given. I believe God already knew he had the right person, Jeremiah just needed a bit more confidence. The gift was already there. The touch of God was not in itself magical.

The one thing more than anything else that an athlete needs, is confidence. You can train all you like. You can have all the skills, but if you don't think you are going to win, the chances are you won't! Our call from God, should instil in us, his confidence, that we can do the task asked of us, by God.

God steps into our lives, indeed, he intrudes 'uninvited'. But this is not '*Mission impossible - your mission if you decide to accept it*'. This is a point of no return. Our call, not a withdrawal from the world, but an encounter that sends us into the world. Not with the message of the church, but with the message of God. Let's begin the journey. Christ stands beside us; the spirit lives within and God is ahead of us. Amen.