

Pay attention to God ...

... make yourself available; offer yourself afresh.

A talk given in the Joint Service on the Fifth Sunday after Trinity, 30th June 2024, by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster.

Exodus 3:1-12; Mark 1:16-21

Last night we saw Charlie ordained as priest, so he's in the driving seat this morning at the altar. And I have with me here this morning an essential piece of ministry kit, which I will attempt to assemble before your very eyes - this is going to challenge my multitasking abilities. But so, come on, I've got a margarine tub and a pair of scissors. Okay? So this is all you need for ministry.

[Jonathan gives his talk from the nave, just in front of the altar. As he speaks, he makes various cuts to the margarine tub, placing the off-cuts on the altar behind him]

In the ordination last night, we saw Charlie being ordained as priest - that was the culmination of a long journey of discernment and prayer and training and waiting upon God and being available. Now, of course, in the church, we don't just have priests. As we look around, there are many different ministries going on - just in servicing our worship normally, we have people who sing in the choir; lead our worship; we have people who read, people who sides-team who welcome at the door; we have a team of people who are called servers. There are all sorts of different jobs that are done in order to ensure that our worship goes smoothly and that everything happens that ought to happen. But of course, the church isn't just about the ministries that take place in worship. We have all sorts of other jobs that need to be done: we have welcomers on the door; we have volunteers who help in the shop; we have people who lead guided tours and share their enthusiasm for the building; we have volunteers who help in the office; and who do the website; we have gardeners who look after the grounds. If you look around the minister you'll see all sorts of different jobs and tasks being done by people, different ministries being offered and they're all of them really important. But the thing we have to make sure we don't forget is that ministries aren't just about tasks being done: ministry grows out of discipleship; ministry grows out of a relationship with God and out of a willingness to listen and respond.

And so I love the story of Moses in our first reading. Moses is attentive to God - he notices the burning bush and he turns aside; he's willing to have his plans interrupted so that he can pay attention to what God might be saying in the burning bush. A conversation then ensues with God, and I love the way this conversation goes, where God says, *"I have heard the cry of my people who are slaves in Egypt, and I have come down to deliver them, and I am sending you, Moses, to Pharaoh."* I love that - 'I have come to deliver them, and I'm sending you.' It sounds a bit as though the Lord is passing the buck there but that isn't what happens - it's because God loves to work in partnership with us. Moses is horrified at the notion. He says, 'Who me?' If we carried on with the reading, we'd have heard Moses make all sorts of excuses not to go to Pharaoh. But the Lord insists and relents enough to send Moses' brother, Aaron, to support him so that Moses then leads the deliverance of God's people from out of Egypt. But his reaction at first is, 'I don't want to go. Send somebody else.'

Maybe that's our reaction, too. When we have a sense that God might be calling us into a deeper discipleship or into some ministry, we may find ourselves thinking, 'I don't want to do this. Send

somebody else. I don't feel equal to this. I'm not worthy. I'm not confident enough. I haven't got enough education. There's other people who could do this far better than me.' It's always a temptation in church life that we see something that needs doing and we think, 'Oh, well, somebody else will do it - that's not my job. Somebody else can get on with that. Other people can do it far better than me.'

But last night we saw Charlie being ordained as priest, and that was the result of a willingness to pay attention to God and to be available to God and that's what discipleship is all about. It was there in our gospel reading, too. Jesus calls those fishermen and they follow him. They listen and they're willing to be available.

[Jonathan completes his cutting of the margarine box...]

I'm making a bit of a hash of this, but we are getting there. *[Jonathan lifts up the remaining piece of the box - white plastic in the shape of a dog-collar]* The essential bit of Ministry kit here is the dog collar. It's an emergency dog collar. We'll put it in a glass box in the vestry so you can 'break glass in case of emergency.'

The thing about being a priest is that it doesn't put somebody in a special category removed from everyone else. The point of being a priest is that you're more like a mirror to the church. You're actually reflecting back to the church the importance of paying attention to God and of being available. Even though we feel unworthy, (and believe me, priests feel deeply unworthy of the role to which they've been called. But nevertheless -) hesitations are overcome in order to be available.

And that is true of every baptised Christian. We are here not to do particular tasks, important though they are - we are here in the end to be disciples: to be those who pay attention to God; who are willing to give time in prayer; to read the scriptures; to listen to what the Lord may be saying to us; to notice the burning bushes in everyday life through which God may be revealing his glory and calling us into a deeper relationship with him. And your priests are there to remind you of that - every time you see a priest, you should be thinking not 'That person is specially holy or that person has been called to a particularly special task I could never do.' - Every time you see a dog collar, you should be thinking, 'That's a mirror, reminding me of the importance of paying attention to God and of making myself available to him.'

However vulnerable that makes us feel, however unworthy we may feel, the Lord is inviting you into a deeper relationship with Him so that He can say, 'I have come to deliver the world, and I'm sending you *[Jonathan now turns and indicates in various directions to the congregation]* I'm sending you, and I'm sending you, and I'm sending you, and I'm sending you, and I'm sending you, and I'm sending you.'

Whatever excuses you make, however unworthy you feel, the Lord is summoning you into a deeper discipleship; the bushes are burning all around, if only we would pay attention; He has a special job for each of us to do, to grow in relationship with Him and to make ourselves available in whatever sphere of life we are able to serve.

So let's listen; let's attend; and let's offer ourselves afresh. Amen.

Reading Texts

Exodus 3:1-12

¹ Moses was keeping the flock of his father-in-law Jethro, the priest of Midian; he led his flock beyond the wilderness, and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. ² There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire out of a bush; he looked, and the bush was blazing, yet it was not consumed. ³ Then Moses said, "I must turn aside and look at this great sight, and see why the bush is not burned up." ⁴ When the Lord saw that he had turned aside to see, God called to him out of the bush, "Moses, Moses!" And he said, "Here I am." ⁵ Then he said, "Come no closer! Remove the sandals from your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground." ⁶ He said further, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." And Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. ⁷ Then the Lord said, "I have observed the misery of my people who are in Egypt; I have heard their cry on account of their taskmasters. Indeed, I know their sufferings, ⁸ and I have come down to deliver them from the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey, to the country of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ⁹ The cry of the Israelites has now come to me; I have also seen how the Egyptians oppress them. ¹⁰ So come, I will send you to Pharaoh to bring my people, the Israelites, out of Egypt." ¹¹ But Moses said to God, "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?" ¹² He said, "I will be with you; and this shall be the sign for you that it is I who sent you: when you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall worship God on this mountain."

Mark 1:16-21

¹⁶ As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. ¹⁷ And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you fish for people." ¹⁸ And immediately they left their nets and followed him. ¹⁹ As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. ²⁰ Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him. ²¹ They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught.