

Sermon on the theme of vocation

Mt. Hawthorn Community Church

1st June 2014

The word 'vocation' is derived from the Latin word 'vocare', from which we also get the word 'vocal'...to find one's voice. It is with one's voice that we *call* to others, and it's God's voice, or Word, that *calls*.

The word 'vocation' doesn't appear in the Bible, so far as I know, but *calling* is all over the place. This is the difference between a secular understanding of vocation as a profession and vocation as a responding to the Holy One. The very first word in St. Benedict's Monastic Rule is 'listen'. Listen to God and respond. The word 'obedience' comes from the Latin 'obedare', meaning to 'hear'.

So shut up and listen! (to God, not to me)

Three point sermon!

- (i) Some brief examples of calling – as Mission
- (ii) Reflect on the Eucharist as a weekly physical embodiment and sustainer of calling
- (iii) Some practical stuff 'how do we listen' (last point on a handout if we run out of time)

(i) **Brief examples – see handout. Callings to:**

- Abraham and hence Israel (calling to be a people to be a light to the nations)
- The prophets (recalling people to be light to the nations)
- Mary (called to bear Christ – archetypical person of openness to receive God)
- Jesus (called and driven into the wilderness; then to embody the calling to Israel)
- Disciples (called and sent to do what Jesus does; preach, heal,)
- Church (called and sent, gift with Spiritual gifts)

- (ii) So how are we sustained, and nurtured in this mission. I come from the Catholic wing of the Anglican Church so my attention is going straight to the Eucharist as an encapsulation of calling to mission. Here is the text, repeated week in and week out, year in year out – reminding us who we are called to be(1 Corinthians 11:23-26):

“ For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you,

- that the Lord Jesus on the **night when he was betrayed**
- **took** a loaf of bread
- and when he had given **thanks**
- **he broke it** and said, 'This is **my body** that is **for you**.
- **Do this** in remembrance of me.'

[In the same way he took the cup also.....]'

In the manner of his brilliant mysticism, Paul will later go on to reflect, “Now YOU are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (*1 Corinthians 12:27*). So Paul clearly makes a connection between the Eucharist and ourselves as a physical embodiment of Christ in the world...so let’s have a look at this passage:

The summary thought of everything I’m about to say is this: ‘In the Eucharist – Jesus gives his own broken body and blood as food (bread) and Joy (wine), so that we might give our own broken bodies and blood as food and joy to the world’. Or, as Jesus says in John’s Gospel, ‘as the Father has sent me, so I am sending you’ (*John 20:21*)

Five sub points:

- A. The Eucharist is set in the context of **betrayal**. I hate to be rather depressing right up front, but let’s just get this one out of the way. If we’re responding to a calling (or vocation) to be Christ’s body in the world, then get ready for betrayal. We WILL be misunderstood, misinterpreted, ridiculed, scoffed at, and beaten up (in many countries in the world right now). No point labouring this point, except to just recognise the reality. So if you’re thinking about a Christian vocation, does anyone need to leave?

- B. Jesus **took** a loaf of bread and a cup of wine and he **gives thanks** to God for them,

In the Bible, bread is a symbol for *life* (manna in wilderness and the feeding stories in the Gospels’; wine is a symbol of *joy* (600 litres of Grange Hermitage at the Wedding at Cana).

We might not think of ourselves that way. We might look at ourselves as fairly unimportant and small in the world but Jesus works with what he’s got. In the feeding stories he says, ‘what ya got here’ (a few fishes and some loaves – that will do – no problem – we can work with that). In calling us, God works with what’s available. Nowadays in business jargon we’d call that ‘appreciative inquiry’. It’s an abundant mind set. Work with what you’ve got and gives thanks for it.

Paul teases this out in his letter to the Corinthians on Spiritual giftedness. No individual has it all – everyone in the church is gifted in different ways and *together* we make up the Body of Christ.

We can also really pick up on this spirit of thankfulness in Paul’s writings (Romans 1:8; Ephesians 1:15-16; Philippians 1:3; Colossians 1:3-4; Thessalonians 1:2; Philippians 1:4)

And, of course, “Eucharist” is the Greek for ‘Thanksgiving’. We give thanks to God, and God, apparently, gives thanks for us (which ought to be rather humbling for us)

- C. Third point – before we are sent out, first we are FED with Christ’s own body and blood. He says, ‘**this is for you**’. In other words, we are given sustenance for the journey.

You may be aware of the instructions in airplanes: 'fit your own oxygen mask first and then fit others'.

We are fed into order to go and feed others.

But what kind of sustaining food is this that we are being given? It's very important to note here that the food we are given is it **broken** body of Christ. The food given by Jesus foreshadows his crucifixion. Life is coming into the world *not* through triumphant heroism but by a love which expends itself right to the very end, even to death.

We are to ingest, take into our bodies, the very act of God's self giving, or as the letter to the Philippians puts it, God's 'self-emptying' (kenosis) (Philippians 2:8). To eat the body of Christ is to internalise the process of letting go of the ego.

Whereas Buddhists say, in relation to attachment, 'if you meet the Buddha on the road, kill him', the parallel statement for Christians is, 'if you meet the Christ on the road, eat him' [the Emmaus story].

St. Paul, once again picks this up brilliantly..... on one place he says, '*If I boast, I will boast of the things that show my weakness*' (2 Cor.11:30) and later says, '*when I am weak, then I am strong*' (2 Cor.12:10).

This points to one of the distinctive aspects of Christian vocation. Whereas secular vocation starts with 'where are your strengths – play to your strengths', Christian calling is fundamentally about trusting in the power of God to work through me in very midst of my weaknesses. If we are feeling incapable then that's not necessarily a bad thing if it forces us to keep up and allow the Spirit to flow.

From a Christian vocation view point, perfectionism is nothing less than an ego-trip.

- D. And this brings us to the last line of our little Eucharistic Passage. Jesus says, 'do this in **remembrance** of me'. As I have fed you with my broken body (broken for the sake of the world), so I send you out to do likewise. We are to be bread (substance) and wine (joy) to others.

To summarise it – 'as the Father sent me, so I send you'. I used to work with a Bishop who is an off the wall extravert. He used to say to me, being a classic introvert, 'you know, Michael, we have a very extraverted God – God's always going OUT there into the world. Exactly what an introvert like me needs to reminded of.

Fortunately we are sent the Holy Spirit who gifts us for the specific ministries to which we are called. And since next week is Pentecost, someone else can elaborate on that one.

- (iii) So this finally brings us to practical stuff.

The primary vocation for Christians is NOT primarily a job or profession – it's baptism. If you're baptised you're called to be bread and wine for the world.

The question some might be asking is, 'yes, but HOW do I do that'. Should I be tip top; or multigrain; or wholemeal. Should I be Margaret River Shiraz or a Hunter Valley Cab Sav. Please note, Mt Hawthorn folks, how I didn't ask, 'what variety of grape juice should I be? (oops – I'm being very naughty).

See separate handout – notes on vocation.

Questions/comments?