

## Thinking about vocation

In thinking about vocation there are at least three strands. The first has to do with the call that can come to any person “Come and follow me”. This is the primary calling of any Christian — the initial call to become a disciple. The second strand is the call to a holy life, to Christlikeness which will mean different things to different people. It will be different for a man as opposed to a woman, different for someone prone to mental illness than for one who is not, different for all of us at different stages of our lives. The third strand of vocation is the call to specific roles in our lives that are often concerned with specific contexts or need or personal circumstances.

Moreover, we usually think of vocation in personal terms and we can point to all sorts of individuals in our Scriptures who responded to God’s call to do something, to take risks, to change direction and to make a difference. But there is also a more communal call to God’s people to be a particular type of community. Bishop John Austin Baker once said that an agenda item on every church meeting or PCC ought to be “What is God calling us to be and do in this community to help it become more like the family that God longs it to be?”

Although these resources are primarily focused on helping individuals hear and respond to God’s call to them, there is also a sense in which we hope they might be used to help churches address the question of what God is calling them to be and do at the moment.

Probably the most critical point in Jewish history was the Exile in Babylon. This was a period of deep searching for the soul of a community that felt bereft, estranged from God, confused in their own theological understanding of what was happening to them, and in many cases despairing and desperate (Psalm 137 — How can we sing the Lord’s song in a strange land?).

Yet this became the most creative period in Jewish history as prophets like Ezekiel, Jeremiah and Deutero-Isaiah (Isaiah 40-55) were active in helping people reassess not only what was happening to them but also their understanding of God. Many scholars today believe Western Christianity has entered a period of exile. Christendom is dying, if not dead. All our old presuppositions about the position and role of the church in society are being challenged by science and secular materialism and sometimes the world can feel like alien territory to a Christian and to those for whom church is still important.

So we are suggesting texts from that exilic period as the basis for our Vocations Sunday material this year. These might provide challenge and /or comfort to both individuals and churches to listen again to God’s call on their lives, both personal and communal.

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*...Thinking about vocation continued*

In periods of exile, alienation and apparent hopelessness, people need a word of hope, even if it is only a glimmer. When God spoke to Ezekiel and showed him a vision of dry bones, Ezekiel was faced with a question, “Can these dry bones live?” (Ezekiel 37:3) He couldn’t answer it.

Hope had not yet been kindled in his heart. But there was a glimmer — “You know” was his reply to God. He had enough trust in God to do what God asked of him. “Prophesy, and hear the word of the Lord.”

Hope is engendered by vision and the true prophet paints such a picture of the kingdom of God that it inspires men and women to work towards it and in such working, to bring the vision that much closer to realisation.

As we think of vocation and the need in our churches for individual men and women to lead our churches and hear God’s call to such spiritual leadership, we also need to reflect on the call to each church community to be the kind of community in which Christlikeness is found. Can these dry bones live?

This material is written in the belief that God’s Spirit can equip, empower and renew God’s people to respond to his call, to make a difference, for Christ’s sake, in the church and in the world.