

SERMON – EUCHARIST SERVICE SUNDAY 18TH JANUARY – Second Sunday after Epiphany

Isaiah 49:1-7 and John 1:29-42

IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER SON AND HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN

Our readings this morning gave me such an embarrassment of riches there was a real danger that our fellowship coffee could turn into a fellowship lunch! But fear not. I come with tidings of great joy! Last week, Nicholas introduced us to the first of what are called the Servant Songs, four passages in Isaiah that focus on the figure known as “The Servant of the Lord”. This week we have the second. For those of you looking forward to hearing the third and fourth Servant Songs over the next couple of weeks then I have disappointing news. The peculiarities of our Lectionary mean you will have to wait until the weeks leading up to Easter for those to appear.

The focus of last week’s reading was on the servant’s unrelenting search for justice, a search that would not be eclipsed by the servant’s weariness or his public rejection. This week, we find the servant expressing a deep frustration:

"I have labored in vain, I have spent my strength for nothing and vanity."

The servant in Isaiah had a mission to restore Israel, to bring Jacob back to God, and it appeared to have come to nothing. As we discovered last week, the city of Jerusalem lay in ruins, the leaders had been carted off in chains to live in exile in Babylon, their temple had been destroyed. Against this backdrop of existential threat, we have Isaiah proclaiming good news almost shouted from the roof tops. Because God’s response to the Servants cry of I have laboured in vain is not one of sympathy. Instead, God says your calling is too small.....an ambition of restoring the Israelites to their homeland is not enough!!! That’s a mere bagatelle. A trifle.

"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant to raise up the tribes of Jacob and to restore the survivors of Israel; I will give you as a light to the nations, that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth."

God's vision is always larger than our own. What looked like failure was actually preparation for something far greater. The servant who thought he had failed in a local mission was being prepared for a universal one. This is the pattern of God's work—taking what seems insignificant, even failed, and using it for purposes beyond our imagining.

There is a theme that consistently crops up throughout the Bible. The story of God's people is full of unlikely servants raised up by God. From Abraham to Moses to Daniel, just to name a few, we read of faithful servants who express grave doubts when God comes calling. They question, in many cases more than once or twice, whether God has chosen the right person, they fear they may not have the energy, the right skills, the wherewithal to see God's plan fulfilled.

Now, hold that thought for just a moment whilst we turn our attention to John's Gospel and that scene by the River Jordan.

John the Baptist sees Jesus approaching and declares,

"Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!"

It's a stunning proclamation—here is the one Isaiah spoke of, the light to the nations. But what I find most fascinating about this passage is what happens next.

Two of John's disciples hear him, and they start following Jesus. Jesus turns and asks them, **"What are you looking for?"**

These are the very first words Jesus speaks in John's Gospel, and they're a question. Not a command, not a proclamation, not a parable, but an invitation to examine their own hearts and desires.

And their response? **"Rabbi, where are you staying?"**

They don't ask for a teaching, or a miracle, or even for certainty about who he is. They ask where he's staying. **Why?** Because they want to be with him, to abide with him, to enter into relationship with him.

And Jesus' response is equally beautiful: **"Come and see."**

This is how God's call works. Not through lightning bolts and burning bushes—though those have their place—but through ordinary encounters, through invitations to "come and see," through the willingness to spend time, to stay, to abide.

The text tells us, **"They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day."** And everything changed. One of those two disciples was Andrew, and the first thing he does is find his brother Simon and say, "We have found the Messiah." By the end of this passage, Simon has become Peter—the rock—given a new name and a new identity by Jesus.

All of this from a simple invitation to come and see.

You see, calling isn't primarily about doing; it's about being. It's about being found by God, being invited into relationship, being transformed by abiding with Christ. Andrew and Peter didn't receive a job description that day. They received an invitation into a relationship that would transform who they were at their very core.

This matters enormously for us today. We live in a world obsessed with productivity, with achievement, with measurable outcomes. It is an easy trap to fall into and dare I say it is one I myself have fallen into just very recently. Many of you will have heard me, and the unfortunate ones will have heard me more than once, talking about the good news of a quiet revival within our parish. Don't get me wrong. This is good news. It is wonderful news. But it is good news for a simple reason. God is at work in our parish.

Our faithfulness on the other hand should not be measured by our programs, our attendance figures, our activities. That could easily lead us to quite rapidly feel, like Isaiah's servant, that we've "laboured in vain" if we don't see immediate, quantifiable results.

God's call to each of us is first and foremost an invitation to relationship, to abiding with Christ, to staying with him. The doing flows from the being. The mission flows from the relationship.

And like Isaiah's servant, we often discover that God's purposes are far larger than we imagined. What looks like failure may be preparation. What seems insignificant may be world-changing. The ordinary encounter, the simple invitation, the willingness to stay and see—these are the building blocks of God's kingdom.

So what might this mean for us practically?

First, it means we can release ourselves from the tyranny of measurable success. If you're involved in ministry—and all of us are, simply by virtue of our baptism—you don't need to justify your calling by results. We are called to faithfulness, to abiding, to being a light precisely where God has placed us. Even if it feels at times like laboring in vain, trust that God's purposes are at work.

Second, it means we should cultivate the art of invitation. "Come and see" is such a gentle, non-coercive approach. Andrew didn't argue Simon into

believing; he invited him to encounter Jesus. How might our evangelism, our witness, look different if we simply invited people to come and see, to taste and see that the Lord is good?

Third, it means we must prioritize abiding over achieving. In our busy lives, do we make time to simply be with Jesus, to stay with him, to let him transform who we are? Prayer, worship, silence, the reading of Scripture—these aren't optional extras for when we've completed our real work. They are the foundation of everything else.

Nearly four years ago I embarked on a journey because I had a lot of unanswered questions. I had no idea where the journey would take me, but I knew with absolute certainty that I would be transformed by it.

The disciples didn't know where that day of staying with Jesus would lead. They couldn't have imagined the journey ahead—the miracles, the teachings, the cross, the resurrection, the birth of the church. They simply accepted an invitation to come and see.

That same invitation is extended to each of us this morning. Wherever you are in your journey of faith, whatever you're carrying, whatever your questions or doubts or disappointments, Jesus asks: "What are you looking for?" And he invites you: "Come and see."

You may feel like Isaiah's servant, like you've labored in vain. You may question like Abraham and Moses and Daniel whether you are the right person, whether you have the skills. You may wonder if your faith, your service, your life makes any difference at all. But God's purposes are larger than you know. You are called not just to raise up one tribe, but to be a light to the nations. Your faithfulness, even in small things, even in hidden things, matters more than you can imagine.

Or perhaps you're like Andrew and Peter, curious, seeking, not quite sure what you're looking for but sensing that there's something more. The invitation stands: come and see. Stay with Jesus. Let him give you a new name, a new identity, a new purpose.

The beauty of our faith is that it begins not with what we must do, but with what God has already done. The Lamb of God has taken away the sin of the world. The light to the nations has come. The invitation has been issued.

Our part is simply to come, to see, and to stay. Everything else flows from that.

Amen.