

Sunday 11 May – Fourth Sunday of Easter

This week we have Café Church at St Luke's so there is no sermon available and only standard prayers. However, the sermon from Chelmsford Cathedral is shown below and can be listened to on the Diocesan website at [Weekly Sermons from the Diocese of Chelmsford](#).

Sermon by Canon Caroline Harding Lay Ministry Adviser and Warden of Readers

Today, 11th May, is Vocations Sunday, a day set aside in the Church's calendar to give us all an opportunity to prayerfully consider our vocation. Maybe considering questions such as: Are we where we are called to be? What does our vocation look like? Or even, what do we understand by this word?

I think when we hear the word "vocation" we often think about our job or career. What we do for a living; how we earn money to pay the bills. Perhaps you remember being asked when you were younger, or perhaps you are being asked now, "What do you want to be when you grow up?"

Together with my incumbent, I lead weekly Collective Worship in our local Primary Schools and through this connection I have in the past been invited to work with Year 6's as they transition from Primary to Secondary school, helping them to think through the changes they are about to face. During one of the sessions I would routinely ask, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" helping them to begin to imagine a future which looks different to being a Year 6 pupil.

There are, of course, some fairly typical responses to that question: lots of young people want to be famous actors, singers, professional football players, YouTubers, a few nurses, doctors, I even once had someone say "Prime Minister". But one pupil, on being asked what they wanted to be when they grew up, replied, "Kind".

They had seen the question not as what they wanted to **do** for a job but what they wanted to **be**; how they wanted to interact with the world and how they wanted the world to see them. They wanted to be kind.

And I think this helps us to work out what vocations is all about, that is more than just doing a job. Not so much what we do, but who we are, who

God intends us to be. We can learn to **do** all kinds of things, but that is different to what God intended us to **be**.

Psalm 139 reminds us in verse 14 that “I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” God has made each one of us to do His mission here on earth. And the way we achieve that is by being who God created us to be. So vocations is about working out what God is calling us to be. Now of course that is going to need us to do some doing too, but at the heart of our vocation is our being. Our ministry is not just about doing things, it is about being who we are made to be.

As a Licensed Lay Minister I do not feel called to a sacramental, priestly ministry. I am not called to preside at the Eucharist, or be the conduit for God’s blessing and absolution. It is not that I am not physically able to do these things, just that the thought of doing them feels completely wrong to me and fills me with trepidation. Those who I have stood next to in the sanctuary when asked to act as a Deacon or to administer the chalice, have commented on how I suddenly become this awkward and fearful wreck. I lose all confidence. I feel totally at sea, lost, in the wrong place.

Ask me to stand up in Collective Worship in front of 150 children and talk about my faith – happy days. Or to preach, or lead a funeral service, or talk about the future of lay ministry in the Diocese – that’s all fine. But ask me to stand in the sanctuary and hold consecrated wine, that takes all my effort not to run away. God does not call me to be in that place.

So where might you be called to be? What fills you with joyful life and makes you smile? What feeds you?

Perhaps it is creating a wonderful experience of greeting so that others feel welcomed as they come to worship. Perhaps it is offering hospitality to those inside and outside the church. Perhaps it is in helping others to worship through the provision of music. Are you called to use your administrative skills to organise rotas, be a contact for church use, or oversee occasional services, liaising with wedding couples, funeral directors and baptism enquirers. Do you enjoy looking after the building and its grounds? Or is your call to be in the world, witnessing to the Christian faith through your secular employment? Or to be a Christian presence through chaplaincy in schools, hospitals or offices?

We are called to serve God's Mission through being the person He intended us to be and that can look like so many different things. And it can often take us by surprise.

In our reading from Acts today, by praying to God, Peter is able to bring back Tabitha from death. I don't think that Peter, as a young boy if asked the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" would have quoted this story, or in fact any part of his story. Peter needed to learn to follow Christ faithfully, to have complete faith in God.

The Bible is littered with stories of people being called, usually unexpectedly, often surprisingly. Think of Old Testament figures like Moses, Gideon, Jonah, or Samuel. Or the call of the disciples in the Gospels.

Fulfilling our vocation is a journey. A journey during which we are formed by experiences through the Holy Spirit and it is a journey which lasts a lifetime.

But it is not a journey we have to walk alone. Sometimes we can struggle to hear the voice of God. Sometimes we need others to accompany us, or to nudge us, or to metaphorically grab us by the shoulders to get us to take notice. So, if you are feeling that niggles inside that simply won't go away, if you feel that there is something you are being called to but you have no idea what, there are people who can help you.

- First of all speak to your friends and family. They know you well and may already have seen particular gifts in you.
- Speak to your incumbent or minister at your church. They will be able to tell you about opportunities to try out different ministries under their guidance, support, and supervision.
- There are Vocations Advisers across the Diocese who you can meet with. These are people who are called to help you to discern, which simply means to work out, where the Holy Spirit is leading you.
- Look out for Vocations Events across the Diocese where you can speak to people already ministering in a variety of roles.
- Check vocations pages on the Diocesan website for courses that might help you in your seeking.
- But above all, keep praying, keep talking to God and, most importantly, keep listening, remembering God often uses the voices of others to communicate with us.

So, on this Vocations Sunday, what is it that you are called by God to be?