

Sermon – Sunday 3rd May 2020

As today is Vocations Sunday I've decided that I'm going to use today to begin a 2 week mini-sermon series as to how I've come to be the Associate Priest at All Saints. Some of you will know my back story but many of you won't and I want to do this to encourage others of you to share your story in future weeks.

Vocation

- a strong impulse or inclination to follow a particular activity or career.
- a strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation
- a divine call to God's service or to the Christian life.
- a function or station in life to which one is called by God
- a type of work that you feel you are suited to doing and to which you should all your time and energy.

Just some of the dictionary definitions that I found when searching for the meaning of vocation.

On the basis of the first definition - a strong impulse or inclination to follow a particular activity or career- I definitely had a vocation from a young age. From the age of 5 to 18 all I wanted to be was an actress. Having been given main parts in school plays and attending a local drama club I couldn't envisage doing anything else. In my head that was what I was going to do and it didn't matter what opposition I had, or how many obstacles there were, or how much the fragility of the business and the fact that my personality wasn't suited to constant rejection, I just wouldn't countenance anything else.

Quite rightly mum and dad wouldn't allow me to pursue an acting career until I was 18 but were both incredibly supportive by driving me to endless rehearsals and watching every play I was in. In my 'A' level year I did auditions for drama schools – and surprise surprise – failed to get into any of them. It turned out that as much as I loved acting there were many, many more people of my age who were clearly much more talented than I was.

So, being the well behaved grammar school girl I was I applied to university to do teaching with drama and was offered a place at King Alfred's in Winchester. I figured it would still allow me to act and would satisfy everyone that told me that I was good with kids so should go into teaching!

That was fine, apart from the fact I failed to do enough work for my 'A' levels and didn't even get the low grades I needed to go there – so it was time to think again.

In those days the answer was to do a secretarial course and get a job! Whilst the prospect didn't excite me I didn't really know what else to do and so after 6 months of training I ended up as a PA to a Stockbroker in London. Having vociferously told my dad that there was no way I was going to work in finance! You have to love God's sense of humour – especially as I had concentrated all my efforts on getting a job in PR or Marketing in the West End!

A few years later, after several conversations with my old youth club leader, I left the safety of the secretarial world and took a job as a Foreign Exchange dealer. Again, my poor dad was left exasperated. He was an actuary with a love of maths, that I hadn't inherited, so he couldn't quite understand how or why I was making this move. To be honest – I wasn't really sure either except that it sounded more interesting than what I was doing!

For the next couple of years I had a ball. It was hard work and we worked very long hours, from 7.45 in the morning until the last client had finished dealing, often after 6, and then at least once a week we were out entertaining clients until late in the evening. As a single person it was great fun. Added to which I was working with a fellow Christian and we were able to attend midweek services in the city together. I left the bank to get married and move to Malawi with Pete – but that's a story for next week.

My vocation as an 18 year old – didn't directly lead me to where I am today – but it did shape who I am. I have huge sympathy for the partners of those working long hours in the city who are left at home to raise the children almost single handed. It exposed me to people from all walks of life from very different backgrounds to the safe and cosseted middle class family I had grown up in.

The important thing is that whatever age or stage of life we are in, we have a God given vocation. That vocation may have been given to us as a child to be a doctor, nurse, vet, fire fighter, pilot, teacher etc or we may have had to go through a succession of different roles, like me until we found the role that best suited our talents. It doesn't matter, as long as you trust in God to place you where he needs you.

Even if the job you are doing now isn't what you want to be doing, there are still ways to glorify God through it.

Give it the best that you've got, be an example to others of how Christ can work through you. Always be honest in your work, not taking short cuts or taking credit for work others have done. Looking out for those who may be overlooked and neglected or being bullied by co-workers.

In these strange times you may have been furloughed from work or are having to discover how to work and home-school at the same time. Ask God to give you the strength, the patience and the wisdom to get you through each day and may you use this time to open your hearts and your minds as to where God is leading you next.

Amen.