

The Perfect Fit

John 10:11 – 18 Acts 4:5 – 12 Psalm 23

Today as we think about 'Vocation' – it might be good to remind ourselves that the word 'vocation' means a person's sense of being called or 'fitted to a task' and with elections just around the corner we might want to make sometime to think about the people behind the parties and their particular skills, ethics and practise before crossing our papers and giving our vote to them.

But before you 'switch off' in fear of hearing a party political broadcast on behalf of the politicians I ask that you might listen to a special manifesto – a declaration of intentions issued by a commander or Sovereign who has no competition and no equal.

In this morning's reading from Acts we hear how the Chief Priests questioned Peter and John following the healing of a crippled man. Called before the Sanhedrin they are asked to explain by what powers or name they had restored this man's disability and Peter, and the text reminds us that he was under the influence of the Holy Spirit, tells them directly 'It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the one you crucified and the one God raised again'.

He is unequivocal in his statement – the man Jesus, whom they put to death and was now risen and was once again at his work through them - had healed this man – a man crippled from birth, who was brought every day to the Temple gate to literally beg for his living – his life! And through the name of Jesus and that name alone he had been given it!

Peter continues to speak of a 'cornerstone' or 'capstone', which is a quote from psalm 118, and is worth some thought and reflection as we remind ourselves that this was a crucial, uniquely shaped stone from which either the foundations of a building were secured or of which the build was completed in being the final or keystone, made with absolute precision that slotted in where needed to bring strength and hold the very essence of a building together – particularly within an arch.

Many stones were rejected by builders in their search for the perfect 'fit' such was the importance of the corner or capstone and Peter likens Jesus to one of those stones – cast aside in preference of another – in order to find something better and he blames the Chief Priests for not seeing that Jesus was that perfect fit – the one and only uniquely shaped 'stone' required for God's architectural building plan.

Peter continues – there is no other name under heaven by which salvation comes, only the name of Jesus.

In a multi cultural, multi religious, multi ethical society in which we live today –this claim that Jesus is the 'only' way to salvation sounds

arrogant, imperialistic, and utterly politically incorrect but is there a truth, a solid truth as firm as that cornerstone or capstone that says - Only One Resurrection – Only One Jesus?

The entire New Testament tells the story of one saving act, which stands out from all others – no other name speaks of an innocent life laid down for others that generates the grace and love shown for the outsider and the needy.

Tom Wright suggests that one of the reasons Christianity spread so rapidly in the Roman world was that nobody had ever looked after the sick and the friendless with the self-sacrificial love that Christians showed.

'The name of Jesus' he says 'speaks of love with skin on, then and now'.

And that is echoed in the gospel reading where we are given a graphic picture of the Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep.

When I was a primary school we had a picture of Jesus hanging in the school hall, it was a beautiful picture of a gentle Jesus clothed in a white robe - standing with a crook in his right hand and holding a lamb securely under his left arm. It was a picture that spoke of safety and love.

But as I've grown up and come to know this Jesus personally I now hold the image of the 'gate keeper' close to my heart – this knowledge that Jesus as a shepherd lies physically down at the entrance to the sheep fold every night to stop the sheep from straying or the enemy creeping in.

I love the image of this picture – the fold where the sheep are gathered each evening after spending the day out to pasture – each nestled against another, secure and safe while the Shepherd lies at full stretch using his body to secure the gap and his crook to keep all ills away.

He lays down his life – he is 'the perfect fit'.

God's mission – the task that Jesus was the perfect fit for – his vocation, if you like, was to reveal the heart of God.

Mission accomplished – and our task as believers is to continue in that work, under the direction of the Holy Spirit, as Peter was, to proclaim the heart of the gospel – Jesus, and to draw all his people together in his service. We are called to carry out that task – and finding 'our' vocation is part of our life's journey.

People often ask me about 'my calling' and I'm never sure what they expect to hear - perhaps it's of some great moment in my life where I fell to my knees in submission to God like Paul's encounter on the Damascus Road but the truth is that it resembled far more the gentle calling of Samuel where it took three attempts by God before the boy Samuel realised just who it was that was doing the calling.

I remember as part of my training being asked to write a poem or a song to express my faith – I chose to write a song and called it 'The God of chances' because I felt I'd missed so many opportunities when God had called me to do something for him and I had simply been too busy or too involved in something else or too scared to accept the invitation – never the less – another chance always lay around the corner.

Much like the crippled man – we too can wait on others too heavily – being carried to the same spot every day – crying out for life with but with no one hearing.

Much like the Chief Priests we can reject the one thing that could bring us security in a way that we could never even imagine yet we choose to look else where for something better.

Yet, like Peter, we could put the 'for sale' sign up on our fishing boat and follow Jesus which could bring the opportunity as it did him to bring life to another in and through Jesus glorious name.

How much of our lives are we willing to lay down for him?

We are all called – to make our lives count in a way that builds up the body of Christ here on earth. He is the cornerstone, the capstone but he calls us to be living stones in order that we can build a spiritual house strong and large enough for all to enter and find peace and rest.

We are all called - to different things for he gives us many gifts to use in his service and the service of others, to encourage, to build up, to care, to love, to give - so that as his faithful followers we too may show the world that nobody has ever looked after the sick and the friendless with the self-sacrificial love that Christians can show – because

'The name of Jesus continues to speak of love with skin on, then and now'. Amen.

Veronica Green