

Bishop's Charge Priests' and Deacons' Ordination Retreat, Petertide 2013

Part I

The first thing I want to say is that I am charging you in this Bishop's Charge with something that *you* cannot do and you need to know that *you* cannot fulfil God's call. As you hear in the Ordination service "*You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God.*" We need to know our "insufficiency" ("*our sufficiency is not of ourselves but of God*", 2 Cor.3:5, writes Paul) to discover the sufficiency of God. Augustine wrote in his **Confessions** "*only as I realise the unfinishedness of my own self that I realise where God is.*"

God specialises in choosing and using people who are not up to it, and know that they are not. When God calls Moses to speak to the people of Israel, he responds, "*O Lord I have never been eloquent, send someone else.*" When God calls the young Jeremiah, he answers "*truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy.*" Karl Barth captures this God-given dilemma well: "*As ministers we must speak of God. As human beings we cannot speak of God. But in recognising both the obligation and our inability, we can give glory to God.*" Knowing our helplessness without God and our dependence on God is the foundation of our ministry.

In the narratives of Scripture, Old Testament and New, we see that it is often in the desert that the discovery is made. In the emptiness and desiccation of the desert, we know a weakness and dependence. Moses and the people of God travelling through the wilderness had to learn the hard way their own dependence on God and at the same time God's utter dependability. Elijah receives God's provision in the desert as he is fed by a raven. God's provision in what seems to be hopeless circumstances. Later, Elijah, burnt out, dejected, hounded and hopeless ... meets God not in the drama of earthquake, wind and fire but in the "*sound of sheer silence*". In that meeting, he discovers God's new call to him. St Paul, the keenest of intellects, that great master of religious argument, after encountering the Risen Christ on the road to Damascus, learnt to let go of this religious status – to see it as "*so much rubbish*" in the silence of the deserts of Arabia (*Gal. 1:17*)

Christian ministry, sharing in God's mission, we need to start on empty ... that is empty of pride. We need to know, in a sense, the impossibility of our call in the natural, like "*lambs among wolves*", it is impossible. But with the grace and power of God, it becomes more possible.

"You cannot bear the weight of this calling in your own strength, but only by the grace and power of God"

Five Loaves and Two Fishes

God uses
 what you have
 to fill a need
 you never could have filled.

God uses
 where you are
 to take you where
 you never could have gone.

God uses
 what you can do
 to accomplish what
 you never could have done.

God uses
 who you are
 to let you become who
 you never could have been.

Philip Clarke Brewer

Part II

If Elijah and the raven remind us of our dependence on God and of his provision in desert places, the Transfiguration reminds us of the glory of God. In the Transfiguration, we see the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. This is not the natural light of the sun or the moon. As St John the Divine writes of the New Jerusalem: “*And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine upon it; for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.*” (Rev.21:23) This uncreated light of the glory of God is the same light that Paul encountered on the road to Damascus. You see it in the icon of the Transfiguration, Peter, James and John find it almost unbearable.

This light, wrote Basil of Caesarea, is the light of the Second Coming when all is revealed. In the Transfiguration, eternity breaks into time. Just before Jesus takes Peter, James and John up the mountain to pray, he tells his disciples “*There are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Kingdom of God.*” Jesus is seen in glory with Moses in glory and Elijah in glory. Moses encountered the glory of God on the top of Mt. Sinai, as he came down the mountain his face is shining so bright that the people cannot bear it. Elijah encountered the glory of God as he called down fire from heaven on the soaked sacrifice with the prophets of Baal, and Elijah doesn’t die, he is taken up into heaven in a chariot of fire, the fire of the glory of God. At the centre of it all is Jesus – the Father pointing to Jesus... “*This is my Son, my chosen; listen to him.*”

At the centre of all is Jesus, and we above all else are both to point others to Jesus and to listen to Jesus.

Irenaeus whom we celebrated yesterday wrote “*the glory of God is a human being fully alive.*” Only in Jesus are we fully alive, only in Jesus do we have life in all its fullness. Jesus is the name above all other names (Phil. 2:9,10). There is power in the name of Jesus. As Peter, full of the Holy Spirit, says to the religious rulers and elders of Jerusalem: “*There is salvation in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.*” (Acts 4:12)

There is nothing more important than your relationship with Jesus, the icon of God (St Paul). Time spent in prayer is never wasted. Not of course simply praying for, petition and intercession ... but adoration, praise, thanksgiving... and prayerful *listening* to and for His voice. Listening to him in the Scriptures, listening for him in the silence.

Simply naming him in faith, the One who has called you by name and speaks to your name in love as he did to Mary Magdalen at the garden tomb. Praying his name in love. Jesus *is* Lord.

Jesus wants you to be with him, where he is and to see his glory. Jesus prays to the Father, “*for those you have given me*”. You are a gift to Jesus, chosen and called by name. Love him as he loves you. Delight in him as he delights in you. Give yourself to him as He has given himself to you.

+John Stroyan