



THOUGHTS FOR SUNDAY  
EPIPHANY 2  
17 JANUARY 2021

*Heroism in a time of change*

I Samuel 3:1-10, Psalm 139:1-5, John 1:43-51

This past week we have had an 'open' Deanery Synod meeting by 'Zoom' at which Libby, Bishop of Derby, outlined the new vision for the Diocese using the gospel image of a boat (the church) on a storm-tossed sea with its occupants (us) being called by Jesus to step out onto the tumultuous waters to follow him.

This is an heroic image which appals and appeals at the same time. The cause of the appalling quality is easy to identify. Many of us, to varying degrees are cautious, wanting to have some idea of the outcome before committing ourselves to a particular course of action, and to be asked to relinquish the comparative safety of the boat for what looks likely doom is too awful for words. The current plague lockdown reveals the spread of attitude. Some people have decided it is not safe to venture away from home at all. Others weigh the risks and advantages of every venture outside. Some try to follow the government guidelines to the letter, whilst a few seem completely heedless of the danger to themselves, or that they pose to others, and do whatever they want. Here once again we see the effect of the virus, magnifying trends and behaviours in society that are always present, but generally overlooked as life rushes on in its normal course.

The appeal of the Bishop's image perhaps takes a bit more probing to discover. In both the reading from Samuel and the Gospel for today we have examples of people being called to service, Samuel himself by the Lord and Nathanael by Jesus. In both cases their response to their calling changes their lives profoundly and for ever, but in both cases, whilst they do not know exactly what it is they are being called to do, they do know who it is that is calling them, and it is because of that, and their trust in the person who calls, that they answer the call, and follow.

Where does that leave us? Do we hear a clarion call, or do we perhaps experience half-noticed promptings over an extended period of time? If we do hear the call, or sense the promptings, do we know whence they came, and do we trust what we hear or sense? Today's psalm, one of my favourites, encourages us to trust the Lord, because he knows us utterly, through and through, from the beginning. Nathanael, in the gospel reading, was impressed when Jesus appears to know something about him from immediately before he was introduced. How much more might we be won over by the Lord who knew us when we were being generated in our mother's wombs and has not lost sight of us since?

If, as I sense, we are living through a time of great perturbation and change, when many of the old certainties are being shaken, we can cling to the externals that were the façades of our old life, to mix the boat metaphor, or we can hold ourselves ready to step out onto the unknown deeps to answer Jesus' call, finding in him that we have in fact come home. I still have no idea, in concrete terms, what the future holds for church or society, but I am convinced that if we listen to God, in his clear call and in his quiet promptings, and chose to follow where he leads, we shall come out right.

In case you are still feeling anxious or frightened, remember that real heroes are not those who feel no fear, but those who go on despite the fear within.

Clive Lemmon