

Vocations

Fourth Sunday of Easter

Acts 9:36-43

- The writer of Acts in telling the story affirms the importance of good works and acts of charity, a vital aspect of Christian discipleship and vocation.
- In the patriarchal world of Acts, Dorcas/Tabitha/Gazelle is celebrated as a committed female disciple. She is called out of the restraints of what traditional roles says she should be and do.
- She is committed to the needs of others in her vocation, responding to God's calling through recognising where she can join in with God's mission.
- God has decided that while others may think her ministry is over, God has not finished with her for God's purposes and so therefore she is restored to life. Do we sometimes prematurely think that God is finished with us or with other people?
- The emphasis here in relation to Easter is new life, new beginnings and transformation. When God calls, people are transformed. In Christ, we are not dead, but called to new life, one of discipleship and vocation.

Psalm 23

- In this Psalm, there is recognition that God is the source of life. The Hebrew word *nefesh* is usually translated soul, but it has a deeper meaning, more like 'life breath'. Without God, we have no life and without God our vocation is just an attempt to earn God's approval, not a response to God's infinite love.
- The Psalm draws on the imagery of God as Shepherd, who cares and loves the sheep, so much so that God seeks ways to nourish and revitalise us. For some, the pandemic has been the 'darkest valley' and a place where vocation has been a struggle: when everything is different, what is my vocation? The Psalm emphasises God's care for the sheep, for us, and the need for rest and restoration. Vocation is not about endless busyness, but serving the One who not only calls us, but ordains Sabbath rest.

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Revelation 7:9-17

- This passage is clear that the people of God includes people from all backgrounds and identities. Vocation is not the reserve of a few, but the call of every disciple from every walk of life.
- In recognising this universal call, we are challenged to ensure our vocations, in serving the Church for the sake of the world, are inclusive and justice-seeking. Our response to God's love should not make it look as though God's love is narrow - it should reflect the One who creates diversity in unity. This should make us pause and look at how representative our churches are in relation to the wider world - not just those who sit in the seats on a Sunday, but those who lead, serve and preach.
- Putting this passage into context, it emphasises the risk of worship in the context of Rome. Worship was not just a fun thing to do on Sunday, it was a choice to deny the gods of Rome and commit to the One God of Israel. In following Christ and responding to our vocation, we have choices to make: do we follow the world's gods or do we follow the One in Christ.

John 10:22-30

- The author emphasises Jesus' protection of his followers. If we choose to follow, though there might be great challenges, we will be looked after - we will not be 'snatched' away. In the context of vocations, this can be incredibly comforting. There have been and are many people who, in responding to God's calling, have found themselves out of their comfort zone. The annual Methodist Covenant Service recognises this. The Shepherd imagery from today's lectionary provides that balance between God leading us in our vocation and the protection God provides when we are in places that are tough, but there as one of God's beloved.
- Jesus challenges those who are yet to believe in him, by emphasising that the works he does in God's name testify to him. This relates to the understanding that the fruits of our work demonstrate whether we are of God or our own desires. In vocational discernment it is recognising these fruits that help us to discern our callings as a community.