

St. Paul's Dorking Small Groups. Oct 16th 2005

Whose Church is it anyway? Called by Jesus

Luke 5.27-32

Acts 9.1-19

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Word: Key points from Sunday's sermon

Over this last month or so we have been asking ourselves the question whose church is it anyway and for a fresh understanding of what it means for us to be God's Church here at St. Paul's. This week we begin the second half of the term getting a bit more personal as we ask ourselves the question 'whose life is it anyway?' The well known play and film of the same name, written as a protest against medical paternalism, ends with the conclusion that it is the individual's life and its up to the individual to choose whether they live or die. Now this may seem fairly obvious'it's my life and I'll make the most of it and do what I want with it' is the mantra of our generation, but for the Christian this is simply not true! Paul wrote "*Do you not know...you are not your own...you were bought at a price.*" 1 Cor 6.19 – 20.

God has a plan and a purpose for us and through the person and redemptive work of his Son we have the opportunity to be disciples of Jesus Christ. The one who laid down his very life for us calls us to belong to him. If we choose to say 'yes Lord' let us not forget that first and foremost he has chosen us and given himself for us. It is his choice and our opportunity to respond (the calling of the first disciples illustrates acceptance of Christ's call – see Matt 4.18-22. the calling of the rich young ruler rejection of the call Matt 19.21). When we say 'Yes Lord' his call on our lives is paramount we cannot then pick and mix and choose a discipleship that suits us leaving out those aspects that are too costly or do not fit into our present lifestyle. It is all or nothing! "*If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it*" Matt 16.24-25.

Levi the corrupt and deceitful tax collector and Paul the cruel persecutor of Christians were confronted by the person of Jesus. He called them to follow him and from that there was no escape. The call to Christ upon our lives is a radical calling! Jesus is no respecter of character, wealth, education or social standing. Both Levi and Paul were the most despicable of people yet Christ called them and likewise he calls us! If we don't feel good enough, or up to it, feel as if we have messed up or are not holy enough then we qualify!

Christ's calling is radical and a radical calling demands a radical response. Levi left everything behind, financial security, career etc and followed Jesus. Paul left power and privilege behind and from being the persecutor immediately became the persecuted. And so it is for us. Christ's call demands a radical response and yet so often we can hold back – "it's not the right time" etc and we slip into a halfhearted lethargic of discipleship on our terms not Christ's.

Jesus call is to follow him now, from this moment on, everyday, to walk with him in obedience and to give everything to him. This is the way of Christ, the way of the cross. It can seem hard but the truth is that when we give up our lives, careers, family to follow Christ and to put him first he gives them back to us – this time shot through with his love. The good news of a radical gospel is that God can take someone like Levi and transform his life - from Levi the tax collector to Matthew the apostle! He can take someone like Saul and transform his life -from Saul the tyrant to Paul the apostle! This radical gospel also means that God can take someone like you and me and transform us such that Christ is known in us and through us.



Witness: Questions to discuss

1. "It's my life and I'll make the most of it and do what I want with it!" – how is this true for you?
2. How does it feel to be chosen by Christ?
3. What aspects of a 'pick and mix discipleship' do you see in
a) you b) your small group c) the Church?
4. What is radical about our response to Christ's call on our lives?
5. Can you share times when it has been hard to put Christ first?
6. Tell your story about how you have been 'called' by Christ.