

I speak to you in the name of God; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen. In our readings appointed for this morning, we having a recurring theme of being called to vocation. However, we are reminded through these readings that the business of faithfully living out one's vocation is not always easy, and that doing so will require us to rely on God's grace.

The first chapter of Jeremiah as one of the prophetic books of the Old Testament is about Jeremiah hearing God's call to ministry and to being a prophet. He emphasizes the point that the design for his life, his vocation, was determined by God even before he was born. And although this is a description of the beginnings of Jeremiah's ministry, it is a reminder to every Christian that God calls each and every one of us into a vocation of some kind. The challenge is for us to discern that call and then to accept and act upon it.

Psalms 71 is a reminder to us that, when we seek to act upon the vocation that God has called us to, we are not alone. God will never abandon us as we journey through this life. He will give us confidence, strength, and a sense of refuge if we put our trust in Him.

Our New Testament reading from 1 Corinthians is one that we most often hear in the context of weddings. However, if we listen to it from the perspective of a call to vocation and being equipped by God with gifts to fulfill that vocation, it takes on a different meaning. We know that Paul lived in the community of Corinth for about 18 months before departing for Ephesus to nurture another Christian community. In this passage, Paul is responding by letter to questions and concerns that have arisen in Corinth since his departure. In the verses that precede chapter 13, Paul reminds the people that God has blessed each of them with unique gifts – the gifts of wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, the working of miracles, prophesying, and the ability to speak and understand different languages. He emphasizes the point that it is the combination of these gifts as they appear in

various members of the community is what will make them strong. However, Paul reminds them in chapter 13 that all of their gifts need to be exercised with love – because it will only be through love that they will be able to thrive as a Christian community and be able to successfully live out their individual and collective vocations.

When we join Luke's gospel at this point of the 4th chapter, quite a lot has already occurred. Jesus has been tempted by the devil after having spent 40 days on the desert, and Jesus has rejected the empty promises of the devil in favour of accepting God's call to ministry. Jesus, filled with the Holy Spirit, then returns to Galilee to fully exercise his vocation for the next three years. When he arrives in Nazareth, he attends the Synagogue on the Sabbath and reads from the scroll of Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." In reading this particular passage to the gathered crowd, Jesus is actually explaining his vocation. At the point where we join the story this morning, Jesus says, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." Undoubtedly, those who heard him could not really understand the significance of what he was saying. Christ was telling them that he was there to fulfill the prophecy of Isaiah that had been written some 700 years earlier. He was there to establish a new relationship between God and humankind and to address issues of injustice, oppression, greed, and corruption – all human vices that separated people from God and that prevented them from engaging in lives and relationships grounded in love. While the initial reaction to Jesus' words were very positive and the crowd was amazed, it was not long before things began to become quite challenging for Jesus as he worked to live out his vocation. There were many times when he and his disciples were in real danger. People adored

him one day, and then scorned him the next. He was constantly being tested by the pharisees and those in authority. And, of course, he was living out his vocation during the very cruel Roman occupation in that part of the world at that time in history. Ultimately, Jesus' exercise of his ministry as the way to fulfill his vocation led to the crucifixion. In this we see the ultimate sacrifice and the ultimate commitment. But as we move deeper into the Gospel of Luke, we hear accounts of miracles, of souls saved, of people being cured from physical and emotional ailments. We hear of people becoming much more aware of their own humanity and of God's love for them. In the 3 years of his ministry, Jesus was able to touch and transform many lives. But none of that compared to the transformation that came about through the resurrection. Imagine if Jesus had chosen NOT to live out God's design for his life, if he had chosen not to fulfill his vocation. Certainly we would not be here today, gathered for morning prayer. The whole course of history would have been altered.

The key word here is "chosen". Jesus, like us, had free will and had to choose whether or not he would take up the challenge of accepting the call that God had given him. We know from our Advent and Christmas readings that his mother, Mary, was aware that God would ask much of her son. And we know that Mary and Joseph were very loving and very supportive parents. But, ultimately, Jesus had to make a conscious decision to devote his life to the vocation that had been given him by God. As Jeremiah reminds us, that design for Jesus' life had been imagined by God before his birth. Again, we heard echoes of that in our Advent and Christmas readings; particularly when Mary was visited by the angel and when she visited her cousin Elizabeth.

What does this mean for us? Firstly, it is important to remember that a call to vocation – and we all have one – lasts a lifetime. The call may shift as we experience life, but it is still there. As we work through that vocation and all of the

surprises, joys and challenges that come with it, we also mature in our faith. When we journey together, we can grow collectively in our faith. The second point to keep in our thinking is that we are in the season of our annual general meetings when we deal with the business of our parishes as separate and joined communities. Far from being a dry meeting time, annual general meetings are also a time for us to discern together what it is that God is calling us to do in the months and years ahead. What needs are present in our community that we might address? What talents and gifts do we have as individuals and as a group that we could use to make a difference and move us deeper into our collective vocation? What opportunities are there within the diocese that might help us to exercise our individual and collective vocations? Budgets, agendas, motions, and discussions are the tools that help us to live out our vocations – but they are not the vocations themselves. My prayer for all of us this week is that we will take some time in the days ahead to think about our AGMs from this perspective and to consider them as opportunities to hear God’s call to us; both as individuals and as a community. Amen.