

Newsletter 18

We hope you are surviving the latest lockdown, this time with an uncertain endpoint! At least we now have the positive news about the vaccine and many in our parish are delighted to be receiving it. However, we continue to hold in our prayers all in the healing professions who are being stretched to their limits.

This is the **Week of Prayer for Christian Unity** when usually we would be sharing worship with our local Christian churches, and so we remember them in our prayers at this time.

We are now looking towards the beginning of Lent next month and are writing with details of our proposed Lent reading, which Angie introduced in her sermon last Sunday (attached). The Church of England have produced '#Live Lent – God's Story, Our Story', a series of short daily bible readings, reflections and prayers for each day of Lent. This is based on the Archbishop of Canterbury's Lent book for 2021, 'Living His Story: Revealing the extraordinary love of God in ordinary ways' by Hannah Steele. We are inviting you to use either or both of these resources and details of how to get them are at the bottom of this newsletter. To help us journey through Lent together, there will be an introductory **Lent discussion group on Wednesday 24 February at 8pm**, based on the Lent reading, and we are planning worship for **Ash Wednesday at 7.30 on 17 February**. More details in the next newsletter. Usually we would have a **Lent Appeal** with a launch event on Shrove Tuesday. As this is not practical this year, we will focus on fundraising for Christian Aid week 9-15 May, including a repeat of the successful quiz night which we held last May. We then have the option of another appeal for a charity later in the year.

The theme of the Easter edition of TRIO is *New Life* – appropriate for Easter but also a positive theme as we look forward hopefully to the end of the Covid-19 pandemic. The editorial team would be delighted to receive contributions from the parish on two related topics:

'New life' – anything where you have had a change which has brought 'new life' - a new job, retirement, new home, becoming parents or grandparents, recovering from a life-threatening illness ... How has this given you a 'new life'?

Vaccination stories – if you have had your vaccination now, how do you feel about it? The editorial team would love to hear from you, even just a few words.

Please contact TRIO editor Pat Jackson by email pat.jackson@blueyonder.co.uk or phone – 0114 281 7557 if you would like to contribute.

Sunday worship at 10 am and Morning Prayer 9.30 am (Monday to Thursday) continue on Zoom using the codes – Meeting ID: 674 532 3083. Passcode: AMCHURCH or by following the link

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/6745323083?pwd=eitkeVdiODV4S1NpRzJvV0ZxbTd6UT09>

Recordings and links to services can also be found on the website -

<https://amchurchsheffield.co.uk>

For people without a computer, you can dial in on your mobile phone or landline using the information sent out last week. People who have tried this for the first time were delighted to be able to join the service.

We will celebrate **Candlemas on Sunday 31st January**. There will be a special liturgy and could you have a candle available to light as part of the service.

As our buildings are closed for public worship, some people may have planned giving envelopes or Christingle collecting candles to hand in. If you would like us to collect them, please contact the Parish Office. Alternatively, you can drop them off at the vicarage porch, but please phone the office to let us know when to expect them so they can be safely received.

With our best wishes, and stay safe!

Peter and Angie

LENT RESOURCES

'#Live Lent – God's Story, Our Story' – Price £2.00 To order a copy, contact the Parish Office by Thursday 28 January – this will give us time to order them and make arrangements to get them to you.

Email htmillhousesoffice@yahoo.co.uk Phone 0114 249 0377

'Living His Story: Revealing the extraordinary love of God in ordinary ways' by Hannah Steele (SPCK)

You can order your own copy at £7.99 plus postage and packing from SPCK:

<https://spckpublishing.co.uk> Telephone order line – 01256 302 699

Sermon - Epiphany 2 2021, broadcast from Holy Trinity at 10 am Sunday 17 January

Readings: 1 Samuel 3:1-10; John 1.43-end

INTRODUCTION

At Morning prayer last Monday, we heard about Mary Slessor. She was born in Dundee in 1848. She worked in a mill from the age of 11 and came to faith as a teenager. She became engaged in outreach work among the deprived youth and developed an interest in overseas mission work – an unusual thing for a woman at that time. Alongside 12 hour working days in the mill, six days a week, she also studied to equip herself for mission work.

Aged 28, she joined the Scots United Presbyterian mission and moved to live in a local community in West Africa. She became fluent in the local languages and was accepted and loved by the local communities because she understood and accepted the local culture. She helped outcast women and she adopted unwanted children. She opposed and eventually abolished local practices such as trial by ordeal and human sacrifice. She encouraged these indigenous peoples to engage in trade. With all of this, she earned the respect of local leaders and the British colonial administration. She was affectionately known as Ma Slessor to her people.

Mary remained in Africa to the end of her life in 1915.

This is a remarkable story of a woman living out her **calling**. This must have started when she came to faith as a teenager, did outreach work among Dundee youth and then became interested in overseas mission work. Did she realise it was a calling, or did she just do what came naturally to her?

Our two bible readings today speak about calling. The young Samuel was called by God – he heard God’s voice, but it needed the older and more experienced Eli to recognise this; the disciples were ‘called’ to follow Jesus. He directly invited them, although they also were intrigued by him and wanted to be around him.

This has set me thinking this week about questions relating to this notion of ‘calling’:

1. **Who is it for?**
2. **How does it happen?**
3. **What may we be called to do?**

1. **Who is it for?**

As I have been thinking about calling, I have come across people who have clearly had a calling to all sorts of things. It is not just for ordained ministers, but for everyone:

- The wildlife cameraman who, as a young boy, was fascinated by a photograph of an arctic wolf. Later, he found himself with the opportunity to go to the arctic himself and film there. His passion and enthusiasm for this job was immense – he clearly loved what he was doing.
- The farmer who loved farming – and said, “heaven forbid that my children should want to do the same thing, but you never know.” So, for him, a calling that he realised is tough but he still felt compelled to do it.

I wonder if this applies to all of the dedicated nurses and doctors working in Covid wards at this time?

I suggest that we are all called to something – not always impressive or glamorous, but perhaps mundane and everyday. During the Covid-19 pandemic, we have grown to appreciate the vast range of key workers – those people who do all sorts of tasks to make our everyday lives comfortable and safe and healthy and provided for: Cleaners, refuse collectors, supermarket staff, health workers, medical staff, carers, scientists, researchers, funeral directors, and, dare I say it – politicians! A whole range of gifts and skills put to use. So, if every one of us has a calling, how does it happen?

2. **How does it happen?**

- Samuel heard a voice, which Eli realised was the voice of God.
- Philip and Nathanael didn’t hear a voice, but they came across Jesus and felt drawn to him and found themselves responding to a call simply to follow him.
- For people like Mary Slessor or the farmer I mentioned, they had a growing interest which developed into a lifelong commitment;
- for some people, like the wildlife cameraman, it is something they see and are naturally passionate about;

- Some who go on to ordained ministry often say it is something they vaguely sense but try to put aside and ignore but eventually, with the help and discernment of others as well as openness to God, they have to give in!
- For some, it may simply be exercising a natural talent or gift.
- For others, it may be unclear, but in the meantime they get on and offer to serve in whatever way is needed at the time – and with hindsight, realise that they have been exercising this as a ‘calling’.

Perhaps you recognise one of these routes as you reflect on your life?

3. What may we be called to?

As we will be starting Lent next month, we have been looking at some of the resources available. One book and study guide promoted by the Church of England has the title ‘God’s story, Our Story’. The blurb says “Both the book and the accompanying daily reflections **encourage all Christians to think about their calling**, how to share their faith and reflect on the difference Christ makes in our lives.” The book by Hannah Steele is entitled *Living His Story*, and a review states “*With warmth and encouragement, she shows us how we can live Jesus’ story in our own lives simply by being the people God made us and allowing people to be drawn to him through our natural gifts.*”

So, where some of us may be daunted by impressive acts by people like Mary Slessor, or may feel that we don’t know how to share our faith, this encourages us and affirms us that we all can be ‘missionaries’ simply by being the people God made us to be and using our natural gifts.

All of this adds up to the fact that we can all be ‘missionaries’ in the sense of continuing the ministry and mission that Jesus began in his three short years between his baptism and crucifixion. Initially this responsibility was taken on by those disciples we heard about today who then had three years alongside Jesus, imbibing his character and attitude in loving, serving, teaching, healing, challenging unjust structures and supporting the oppressed. And now, as disciples of Jesus many generations on, the baton has passed to us.

If it had not been for Covid 19, we would be sharing in worship with Millhouses Methodists around now, with the annual Covenant Service, in which we offer ourselves again at the start of a new year, to serve God in whatever way we feel called.

This is something for us to ponder in the weeks ahead. At the end of her life, it was clear that Mary Slessor had a calling and served God in the way that she was fitted for with her unique gifts and interests. We may all ask ourselves:

As I look back on my life, what would I say has been my calling?

And as I offer myself to God at the start of this year, what am I being called to now?