

What did you want to be when you grew up? Or if you are younger, what do you want to be when you grow up? That's a real question. When you are young, teachers & adults tend to ask 'what do you want to be? On this 'Good Shepherd Sunday' which is also 'Vocations Sunday' I wonder if a more useful question might be, '**Who** do you want to be?'

Careers advice in my school was haphazard. It included all sorts of suggestions, but becoming a parent wasn't mentioned as part of our future lives. Nor was becoming an artist or a priest or joining a religious community. Those are examples of someone you become rather than something you do. I think God is interested in who we become.

At the moment, with young people fearing for their educational future and aware of the lost exams which might have decided that future, it is a difficult time to be thinking, 'What shall I do with my life to become the person want to be?' But the truth is, it's never the perfect moment to think about important stuff. You always have to keep today's balls in the air. In the past, decisions had to be made in the face of plague or war or famine. At the moment you have to stay indoors, keep occupied, keep your temper, wash your hands. You don't know what's going to happen next. But then one never does. Your life, your future will include people whom you haven't yet met and require of you gifts that you don't know you have.

So how to decide? When I ask - 'Who do you want to be? I am not speaking only to our young people. There's a moment in this service at the beginning of worship when we confess our sins. That allows us to throw out all the stuff we got wrong and start afresh. 'Now, Who is it I am to become?'

In first century Palestine, you would generally take on the job your father did. Jesus was expected to be a carpenter like Joseph - and according to tradition, as a young man so he was. But then he was called in another direction - to live out whom he truly was- the Son of God. It's interesting that as part of his description of who he is, Jesus uses the imagery of a shepherd. Although in Bath we're not generally close to sheep I think we can understand the imagery of a shepherd as a leader. One who calls us by name, knows us and by 'sleeping across the door' protects us. But note that the shepherd in the parable also lets the sheep go in and out of the sheepfold freely to what Jesus calls 'pasture' and we might call, the richness and refreshment of the life to which we have been called. Called? Well yes. Jesus says that the shepherd 'calls his own sheep by name and the sheep follow him because they know his voice.' So there is a calling in the Christian life. We are called by name to follow and to live our lives as followers.

It's not generally an external voice from 'out there.' It comes, Thomas Merton wrote, from discovering the voice inside us: "Discovering vocation," he wrote, 'Doesn't mean scrambling toward some prize just beyond my reach but accepting the treasure of true self I already possess. Vocation doesn't come from a voice out there calling me to be something I am not. It comes from a voice **in here** calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfil the original selfhood given me at birth by God.'

Picasso said it took him a lifetime to learn to paint like a child. Jesus said unless we become like little children we shall not enter the kingdom of heaven. Wordsworth knew the 'original selfhood, too. 'Not in utter nakedness, but trailing clouds of glory do we come from God who is our home.' The things we love and are drawn to as children are often pointers to what it is we are called to - that 'original selfhood' given to us by God. So if you are young, have confidence. That secret ambition in your heart may be put there by God. And if you are not so young, that ambition you have had all your life and still cherish - there may be a Godly reason why it is still there. Prayerfully listen to it!

And there is a promise attached. Jesus mentions the rich pasture and the freedom for those who follow him to go in and out - to work and to rest. And then, at the very end he promises his followers -

'I came that they may have life and have it abundantly - in all its fullness.' Life in all its fullness, Life with God, eternal life. That is the promise for us if we listen to and follow his calling voice.