

# Called to Serve

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- [ 0 : 0 0 ]     Good morning, and a happy Mother's Day to all of you who are mothers, and all of you who have mothered somebody that you did not bring into the world.
- Fathers, your turn next month. Bill asked me for a title of what to speak on today, and I said off the top of my head, called to serve. And subsequently, his archivist, the lady in blue, pointed out that I had already spoken on this.
- Well, I didn't want you to think that I only had one tune to play here. So consider this as called to serve two, or the sequel, or volume two, whatever.
- I think we could go on talking about this forever. I concluded my last talk with a quote from our communion service, in which we all make this rather grandiose promise to God, offering ourselves, our souls, and bodies, think about that, that's really all of you, to him as our reasonable service.
- Now, this is a very serious promise, and one that should never be taken lightly. As it is there for all of us to say, we can presumably, we know that we are all called to serve, and that we should be expecting to be called.
- [ 1 : 2 3 ]     Now, Harvey mentioned being called to serve last week, and Greg Venables mentioned it the week before, and both of them were talking about a universal call.
- Today, I'm going to talk about individual calls, and these might be something that lasts a lifetime, or something that lasts a day or two, and you will be able to sort that out.
- Recognizing the nature of an individual call is a very unique, and often a very private experience. So we can't ascertain a formula for this. If we could have, I would have brought it. But each of us can rely on the help and promptings of the Holy Spirit in this, and we should not be afraid to ask for his help.
- His ongoing activity in our lives is hugely important as we seek to discover, out of the many claims on our time, what is the reasonable service that God wants from us at any given point.
- That said, some people, past and present, have told us how they discovered the call to serve, and how they responded. And so I'm going to follow, if you've got the yellow sheet in front of you, both sides of it have information.
- [ 2 : 3 3 ]     So the plan on the one side of it will help us with this. These are interesting people, and we will look at some biblical examples, some historic examples, and some alive and well and living at St. John's examples.
- So we'll try and bring that very much up to date. But first, we will pray. Father God, you have told us that you love us, that you have called us by name, that we are precious in your sight.
- Amen. Amen. And also, that we can contribute to the work of your kingdom in this world. Help each of us to discover, to ascertain, to prepare for, and to accomplish those serving tasks, large and small, that you want from us as our reasonable service.
- Guide and direct us in all that we do in your name and for your glory. In Jesus' name, amen. We start with Moses.

Big surprise there. You can usually start quite safely with Moses on nearly any topic. Now, here was a man uniquely prepared for leadership, having been raised in the household of Pharaoh's daughter, where he gained the privileges that other Israelites would not have had.

[ 4 : 03 ] But he became a fugitive as a result of having committed murder, and at the time of his call, he was living far from the seat of power. He was off in the north of Egypt in the land of Goshen, tending sheep and working for his father-in-law.

Moses' call came while he was out with his woolly companions. There he encountered a bush that appeared to be burning but was not consumed, and out of it came a voice.

The voice of God. Now, Moses, you will remember, was not raised as an Israelite. There is, you know, reference in Genesis to his apparent disregard for something as important as circumcision, and his wife having to take him to task about this.

So he didn't have a strong tradition of dealing with God like Israelites would have had. And since this was a religion that God had protected for 400 years, it seems odd in a way, doesn't seem odd retrospectively that he picked Moses, but it must have seemed odd to Moses at the time that God would be calling him.

So his first question is, who are you? This is scary stuff. But God identified himself and gave Moses a special task of leadership.

[ 5 : 17 ] You, Moses, are going to take the children of Israel out of Egypt, out of bondage, and up to the promised land. It was a big job involving danger. And Moses was less than enthusiastic about taking this on.

Here's his special calling. And he doesn't really want it. First of all, he says, oh gosh, nobody will believe me. No one. No one. I mean, it's that big a job. And God said, well, you can do it.

And then he said, well, I wouldn't know what to say. What shall I say? Is there a script for this? Whatever. And lastly, he sort of says, have you thought about Aaron? You know, he'd be a much better choice.

Now, you see, here we go. All kind of reluctance on his part, even though the call was very specific to him. Then God asked him what he had in his hand and convinced Moses that together they could get this job done.

What Moses had in his hand was an everyday prosaic piece of equipment, a shepherd's staff. But put to God's use, it became important in accomplishing the task.

[ 6 : 23 ] I think there are times when we should be asking ourselves the question, ourselves, what do I have in my hand? And what do I have that I could offer to God?

We don't always have to wait to be asked. And it doesn't have to be something grand and glorious. Even the most commonplace talent can be put to God's service. And I think you will find an illustration of that on the back of your sheet.

We'll look at those later. In the story of Jonah, we are not told how God called him, only that it happened. This story is usually remembered more because of a big fish than for the reluctant servant of God.

And when I was looking up some stuff about this fish, I found that theologians argue about things like, was it a fish or was it a whale? Because a whale is a mammal. Never thought of that because I've certainly heard it referred to sometimes as a whale.

So which was it? Was it a fish that swallowed him but did not digest him? I had never thought of that. I mean, it would be a much bigger miracle, wouldn't it, if God had to put him together from the forensic contents of the fish's stomach.

[ 7 : 40 ] Or lastly, was it a fish at all? Is it a metaphor for something? Well, you know, there are plenty of metaphors in the Bible, but I am certainly sick of people deconstructing everything into a metaphor.

Now, Jonah was told that the service God wanted from him was to preach to Nineveh. Nineveh is no longer even an archaeological dig. It has been dug up.

It was a big city, 80,000 people, roughly 180 square miles, I think. A walled city, right across the Tiber River from Mosul, which is very much in our news these days.

But it was a big city when he was told to go there. He didn't want to go, not just because he feared what would happen to him on the journey. He didn't want the Ninevites to repent.

And he was given the job of convincing them of the need to repent. He wanted them to go to hell, really, literally. So he wasn't going to accept this assignment.

[ 8 : 44 ] No way. According to tradition, Jonah lived in Zebulun. That was the tribe that he belonged to. And that was, unless you count the Sea of Galilee, a pretty landlocked kind of place.

Nineveh was over land east of that. So he set off for the port city of Joppa, which was west of that. And then he took a boat to Tarshish going northwest of that.

You know, he wanted to go as far as he could get. But, as you know, the voyage was a disaster. He endangered the lives of the crew of the ship, didn't succeed in sacrificing himself during the storm, but was swallowed and later on washed up on dry land.

And then, and only then, did he continue his journey in the direction that God had set for him. Now, some people probably do get away with ignoring God's call.

But my advice, don't count on it. God did not leave Jonah alone until he completed the task that God had sent for him.

[ 9 : 48 ] Took him a while to get the message, but he did get there. Next, we turn to Isaiah, my absolutely favorite prophet in the Old Testament. I have always thought that his call to serve was a unique and unequivocal experience, so life-changing for him that he wanted to anchor that experience in time for us.

In the year that King Uzziah died, we can find out when that was if we want. I didn't look it up. I figured you needed some homework. In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord.

How many people in the Bible could make that statement? I saw the Lord. Not a burning bush. Not a dove. Not a pillar of cloud or of fire.

Not a second-hand message from an angel. Right there, clear and direct. Who will go for us, God said to him. And Isaiah, totally overcome by the experience, describes the inadequacy in his own life in accomplishing God's task.

But unlike Moses, who also felt inadequate, here's Isaiah. He volunteers anyway. Here I am, Lord. Send me.

[ 11 : 09 ] I think that's quite remarkable. So God cleanses his lips as a preparation for speaking out his truth. And Isaiah is accepted into service. It's okay to volunteer.

It's the message here. It's okay to volunteer for God's service. And many people find that their voluntary service is entirely acceptable to God. And that is the reasonable service they want to give.

Okay. Not everyone is as reluctant as Jonah or as certain as Isaiah was about a call. Some people just get it wrong.

They wish to serve God and set about to do this. But their own desires get in the way of God's purpose. This is particularly important to consider if you are an impatient kind of person and you've offered God your services.

And you're tapping your toe and thinking, when is he going to tell me? When is he going to tell me? It is relatively easy to take over the agenda that God may have for you if you are not getting an answer as quickly as you would like.

[ 12 : 18 ] Is that just me that is always impatient or do some of you experience that too? Take Paul, for instance, who is on our list.

No one could say that he was not serving God. He was implementing God's missionary service as he saw it. But having worked his way through western Turkey, the Roman province of Asia, he then turned his face toward eastern Turkey, what could be more natural in a way, specifically the Roman province of Bithynia.

On his way in that direction, we are told that the way was blocked. They don't tell us what it was. Passport difficulties, lineups at the border, we don't know. The way was blocked.

But what we do know is that subsequent to this, he had a dream in which a man, possibly Greek, asked him to come over into Macedonia and help. And Macedonia was in Europe, not in Asia Minor.

Note that this is a man as a messenger. We've had a burning bush. We've had somebody, we don't know how Jonah got the message. And we've had God himself presenting his countenance to Isaiah.

[ 13 : 37 ] But this time, it is a man as a messenger. It isn't God he sees. Now, Isaiah had already had a vision that did include Jesus. You will remember that on the Damascus Road.

And perhaps because this message from God was so different from his first encounter, Paul is the one who has to interpret this message, which he does.

He interprets it as a message about the direction that he should go in west instead of east. That is, to travel into the Greek world. I wonder what the outcome for our faith would have been if he had kept going to Bithynia.

Interesting speculation, eh? God wanted to keep him on Roman roads, that seems certain. So far, we have learned that not only is God's call personalized, tailored to the individual, but also that many different responses are recorded, including a need for clarification, a definite no, a definite yes, and a definite I must have got it wrong, followed by a need to redirect.

Let's move on now to some examples drawn from history. We start with St. Patrick, who was a Briton.

[ 14 : 56 ] We don't use that word very much anymore. We call the people who live in England Brits. But the Britons, in the sense of St. Patrick, were the Celts left over after the Roman occupation ended, because the Romans invaded England when it was a Celtic country, and full of people who are the...

The Celts are the Iron Age people, if you're trying to locate them in history. The people that brought advanced metalwork to the West. And so when Rome called the legions back to defend the heart of empire against the barbarians and so on, those Celts were still there.

But if you're looking for them in history, they are called Britons. The 400 years has made a difference to their title. He was born into a Christian family. We think his father was kind of a civil servant, well-educated, and a family of some means.

But poor old Patrick was just too close to the seashore on the day when, as a teenager, he was captured, abducted by pirates, and taken in slavery to Ireland.

He remained there for 14 years as a slave. His job was tending sheep. Do you get the idea here that tending sheep has some unusual experiences associated with it?

[ 16 : 14 ] Some risks in being a shepherd? After 14 years, he managed to escape and return to England with the strong conviction that the Irish, who still worshipped pagan gods, needed to hear about Christ and the message of salvation.

Why were they still worshipping pagan gods? Because when Roman roads were obviously a good way for missionaries to get around, the Romans never went to Ireland.

Can you believe it? That beautiful country. But they never actually went across the Irish Sea or set foot in Ireland. It was never part of the Roman Empire. So these people were still worshipping the Iron Age gods.

And that would include a lot of things associated with nature, the Druidic religions. And some of the holy wells, you know, in Ireland is kind of cute, have been kind of absorbed into Christianity.

The places that were holy wells dedicated to a god called Bridget are now dedicated to St. Bridget and have been adopted into the Christian faith and maybe they still do wonderful things.

[ 17 : 25 ] Now, he did not return to Ireland immediately after getting this call. He began a period of intensive study in England and then in Europe.

And he became a priest. And to cut to the chase here, he became a bishop. And then, and only then, did he return to Ireland to undertake the major task of evangelizing the Irish tribes.

Here is another example of a person whose experience in slavery, well, Moses' experience was not when he was in Goshen, but his experience in Ireland gave him a unique understanding of his target group.

He knew their language and customs. He also knew about their political system and the power of the tribal chieftains. Now, I'm going to digress slightly here. I hope you won't mind.

I'm pretty good about derailing my train of thought. Ireland was a whole pile of little tiny kingdoms. Some of this is reflected in their counties these days. Unlike some other tribes in other parts of the world, they called their chieftains kings.

[ 18 : 31 ] So you might be king of perhaps a few square miles, but you still had the power of life and death over the tribal members. In addition to that, they elected, out of all these petty kings, a high king, usually in Tara.

Now, where have you heard that expression? High king. High king of heaven. Do you remember that in our Irish hymn that we sing now and then, Be Thou My Vision?

King of kings. We might have said the Irish would have understood that concept entirely, very quickly, entirely, I should say, very quickly, very quickly, because they had that political system.

Now, because the chieftain had decision-making for the whole tribe, in every case, including religion, Patrick began by converting the leaders, knowing that the tribe would be required to adopt the Christian God if the chief converted.

There's an interesting, maybe apocryphal story about the chieftain that was being baptized, and Patrick, with his shepherd's crook, which had a pointy end on it, was leaning on this, and the point was going into the toe of the chieftain, who did not move a muscle and did not say a thing when his baptism was over, the blood was gushing out of his toe, and he thought this was part of the baptism.

[ 19 : 59 ] So, in good Anglican style, the Irish were first baptized, and then they were taught about salvation. Unlike the biblical examples, Patrick did not just plunge into his assignment.

He spent a long period of preparation for a return to Ireland, knowing that he would be working alone for quite some period of time. But some of the people that he converted very quickly joined him in his missionary work, to the point where, at some time, he and St. Kevin divided Ireland about who would deal with the North and who with the South.

But the fact that he took this call seriously enough, I've told you, he was well prepared for the job. He was well prepared for the job and knowing about the Irish, but he felt a deep need to learn how to minister to them, and that was good.

A long period of preparation also characterizes St. Ignatius Loyola, who is next on our list here. He was a Spanish soldier, born into a noble family at a time when Spain was a collection of small, lively kingdoms, not as many as Ireland had.

And they were usually fighting each other in Spain. He was born about between 9 and 10 hundred years after St. Patrick.

[ 21 : 28 ] And there was a lot about the world that had changed, but tribes fighting each other and kingdoms fighting each other had not changed. So think late 1400s, what's happening then.

Columbus, yes, but also the Reconquista in Spain where Ferdinand and Isabella were trying to unite the country under their rule. So they had a war going pretty well all the time, not just getting rid of the Arabs, but also some of the other kings, dukes, counts, whatever.

In the Battle of Pamplona, Ignatius was badly wounded and not expected to recover. He had a dreadful wound. He was hit by a cannonball between the legs.

It completely shattered his left leg and it damaged his right leg. And here he was, unable to stand, walk, wield a sword, or get on a horse. Here's a man with a career at an end as a soldier.

But really, for a while, that didn't concern him as much as trying to recover from this. They had to take him some miles to get any kind of medical attention. His bones set badly on the journey.

[ 22 : 35 ] They had to be rebroken and the whole thing had to be done again. It was when he was lying on his bed of pain that he had a vision, not of God, but of the Virgin Mary holding the baby Jesus.

She, it seems, was the bearer of a message for him. We aren't told exactly what this message was. I have Catholic friends who believe very strongly that Ignatius bargained with her for his life, saying, if you save my life, I will become a soldier for your son, Jesus.

Now, he did become a soldier for Jesus. But the Jesuit order, which is the order that he founded to, all of which are soldiers for Jesus, does confirm the fact that he had a vision.

They do not confirm the fact that he bargained about this. Sensible, I think. Ignatius recovered and he did keep his promise.

But first, he had a lengthy period of study. This was a man who had not given a lot of attention to studying theology. And he studied in several parts of the Catholic Empire.

[ 23 : 42 ] I'm going to call it that for lack of a better name. And badly, badly wanted to go to Jerusalem. Now, if you look at a map and you think of dates, I know you hated memorizing all of these when you went to school.

Some people hate history because there are dates in it. But they are pegs to hang events on. And the events that were happening in the late 1400s and early 1500s was the Ottoman-Turkish expansion in the Near East.

And Jerusalem was off limits. So here's a man, again, who has in mind he wants to go to a certain place and God redirects him.

He got permission from the Pope to found a new religious order of soldiers for Jesus. Unlike any that had gone before. You know, the Middle Ages had religious orders popping up here, there, in the next place.

Some of them very small. Some of them with universal importance. Benedictines, we've got out at mission. You know, probably the first monastic order, I think. Harvey will tell me if I'm wrong about that.

[ 24 : 47 ] And those were people that did not particularly go out into community. They went into a monastery away from the world's ills and learned to serve God there. That is still partly true of our Benedictines.

There were others like Dominicans, Franciscans, and so on. All of those are medieval orders. The Jesuits are not. The Jesuits are definitely Renaissance people.

Now, they describe themselves as soldiers for Jesus, but that does not mean that they took up swords. They were not like the Templars and the Knights of Malta who did know how to fight as well as how to do other things.

But Ignatius knew from his military training, and here's where experience has to be considered in responding to a call by God.

And you might want to look at your own experience to see if it fits what is on your heart and mind to do. He had been a soldier. He knew how to recruit, train, and organize men.

[ 25 : 52 ] He knew how to endure hardship and deprivation, how to take and give orders, how to lead a disciplined life. And if you want to know how to lead a disciplined life, the discipline of St. Ignatius or of the Jesuits is still a good guide.

All this he brought to his calling, and the Society of Jesus, the Jesuits, burst into a tired and corrupt Catholic world with an energy, skill, and commitment that the Church had not seen for centuries.

And there he is on the brink of, you guessed it, the Protestant Reformation, forming something that is going to revitalize Catholicism. This society was the major tool of the Catholic Counter-Reformation, not because they were associated with the Inquisition.

No, they weren't. They were involved in trying to convert back to Catholicism the people who had toyed with or become quite convinced about Protestantism.

And the remnants of that kind of commitment, that kind of training, they are trained for years and years and years and years and years. They never, ever really stop. 14 years of post-grad study would be a beginning.

[ 27 : 09 ] A beginning. And as a result of this, partly they can be found in missionary assignments, which was always part of their job, university campuses, diplomatic corps, and yes, sometimes local parishes.

churches, we were probably privileged in a way to have a Jesuit priest in Dunbar for many, many years, Father Leahy, little Irish guy.

And anybody who was toying with the idea of Catholicism or wanted to learn more about it or was quite sure they wanted to convert, the bishop would send them to Father Leahy. And I did meet this man once, I've got to tell you this, because we need a joke about now, right?

He came to my hospital where I was working and he was coming down the hall with the administrator when I was leaving my office and so I was very nearby and the administrator waved me over and said, Father, I'd like you to meet our Mrs. Westberg, blah, blah, blah, blah.

And he took me by the hand and gazed up at me through the bottom of his bifocals and said, Oh, yes, my dear, I think I remember you from CYO. And I said, What's CYO?

[ 28 : 16 ] And the administrator said, I don't think so, Father, she's a Baptist. So he kept holding my hand and he said, In that case, I shall invite you to tea.

I make it with holy water. We get some sneaky conversions that way. A delightful person, really, and I think he must have been there for about 30 years.

Do you know? Do you know how long he... I'm saying Father Sigmund. Father who? Sigmund. Oh, Father Sigmund was also a Jesuit? Oh, interesting. I didn't know that. I want to say something about visions.

I guess for most of my life, I had a common Protestant skepticism about visions. Visions happen to people in the Bible and they happen to Roman Catholics.

You know, because Roman Catholics talk about their visions and many of their saints that we know, you know. Bernadette Subaru had visions about Lourdes.

[ 29 : 21 ] Little Juan Diego in Mexico had a vision of the Virgin Mary with a brown face. and St. Teresa of Avila, an important contemplative nun, had visions of Christ striking her heart with arrows.

And so this was my thought. You know, it doesn't happen to Protestants. Or if it does, they're very quiet about it, right? They don't want people to look at them and say, oh yeah, you've had a vision.

Uh-huh. But I think I have to tell you about a Protestant I know who did have a vision of Christ. This was a very, a very delightful lady and one that I really wished I had known a lot better who was a guest at my dinner table one time a few years ago and I had, you know, a handful of people there.

We had a great time together. She had a very severe handicap which she did not expect to get over and was gradually making her worse. But as a result of this, there were multiple hospitalizations for her.

We'd settled down to coffee and dessert and I can't remember what the lead-in conversation was about this, but she decided to tell us that she had had a vision of Jesus during one of her hospitalizations in which he stood at the end of her bed.

[ 30 : 45 ] I don't remember what, if anything, he said to her. What I remember was what her reaction was that she knew that this was a very reassuring thing that he had done that whatever the outcome of her handicap or of that particular hospitalization, Jesus was going with her wherever she had to go.

Now, you might wonder why she told us that, but I'm going to interpret her vision since she is not here to do it for us. I think the fact that she told us was definitely a testimony to Christ and we know whose job it is to testify to Christ, don't we?

And they all together said, you didn't. The Holy Spirit, it's his job to testify to Christ. Instruct, correct, and testify to Christ.

So clearly, she was moved by the Holy Spirit, in my view, to tell us about this. I don't know how many other people she told about this vision, but even in a very handicapped state, she went right on witnessing to her God.

And I was glad to be a part of the person of the group that heard about her vision. Some people say, oh, it's drug-induced. Well, I've had drug-induced visions.

[ 32 : 07 ] I call them hallucinations when you're in hospital. And it's not the same kind of thing at all. Schizophrenic hallucinations are not either.

And I think if you ever have a vision, you might want to ask, as Moses did, who are you? Because God will tell you if he's a part of this or not.

I want to turn now to David Livingston, because here we find a man who had a very different kind of vision and I suspect the kind that we are much more likely to experience than something more grandiose like the ones that I've been describing.

Now, we've had a couple of sessions on David Livingston, so I'm not going to go into a lot of biography here. But just to remind you, who was it? David Livingston, was it Will Johnson?

Will Johnson, yes. Scottish lad, worked in the factories in Scotland 12 hours a day with his Latin book propped up on the loom trying to learn enough Latin to get into university.

[ 33 : 16 ] He did get into university. And after his graduation, he went to London to study medicine. He had the feeling that he wanted to be a missionary before he ever went there.

And there was a wise Scottish gentleman, older than he was, an experienced Christian, and it's always a good idea to listen to people like that in your life, who said to him, if you're going to serve the Lord, laddie, don't do it in fits and starts.

Well, nobody could have said that he ever did it in fits and starts. I mean, he went straight toward his goal in the way that he could. He joined the London Missionary Society even while he was studying there.

So he was really preparing, believing that God had called him to China and quite intent on going to China. And that did not happen because, again, the road was blocked.

This time, 1840, by the First Opium War in which Britain was at war with China. And my goodness, are we paying a price for that today? Anyway, I digress.

[ 34 : 24 ] I'd like to say something about the world in which David Livingston lived. Britain, which was the first Western country to have the Industrial Revolution for reasons related to geography mainly, had become wealthy.

It had a navy that nobody could touch after the defeat of Napoleon. It could go anywhere it wanted. It had a huge empire consisting of great big places like India and Canada and half of Africa.

And it had little places like Malta, Singapore, Hong Kong, da-da-da-da-da. And so it really could go anywhere unmolested. And as a result of merchants, naval officers, all kinds of people going to those places and coming back with fantastic stories about what those people were like, what they wore, what they ate, what is this mask all about?

I brought it home because I liked it but I don't actually know what they did with it. You know, this kind of thing was happening, a huge interest, an explosion of interest about the world outside of Britain.

Now, that is a context in which people would go to just about anybody who was lecturing about other parts of the world. Royal Geographical Society, Missionary Society, they could bring in speakers and there was always a line-up for tickets because people were hungry for first-hand information about other parts of the world.

[ 35 : 55 ] And this is the spirit in which David Livingston went to hear a Dr. Moffat who was a returned missionary from Africa. Now, he's trying to get to China but it's not going to happen. You know, there was a second opium war after the one that stopped him.

So he needed to redirect. And Dr. Moffat described what his life in Africa was like. And during that speech he said these words, I have sometimes seen in the morning mist the smoke of a thousand villages where no missionary has ever been and where the love of God has never been preached.

That's a very powerful image. How many of you can see it in your mind's eye? Can you see the smoke of a thousand villages? So could David Livingston and he couldn't get it out of his head.

The smoke of a thousand villages haunted him. He kept seeing this image in his mind's eye. Now, I think that is the kind of vision that more of us are likely to get where there is a very persistent thought, a very persistent mind picture, something that doesn't let us go until we do something about it.

And so he did redirect and he went to Africa, married Dr. Moffat's daughter and, you know, the rest you'll find more in the geography books than anywhere else because of his explorations of the Zambezi and Victoria Falls and stuff like that.

[ 37 : 24 ] And if he'd been there long enough, maybe he would have got to the source of the Nile. Now, I've mentioned just briefly about the Industrial Revolution which is this period of huge explosion of wealth and invention and trade and so on.

Personal, social, commercial, mechanical. Think of it as the 18th, 19th century equivalent of the technological revolution that we've experienced in the last 50 years.

It changes everything, including the way we relate to our world and its people. I mentioned that in Victorian England people went out to the far corners of the world.

Now, the four corners of the world is coming to us. I live in the West End. Just look around me. Look around where you live. The four corners are coming to us. The immigration pattern is reversed.

Then, big machines replaced the work of people's hands. Now, little machines replace the work of people's minds. We are part of a rapidly changing world whether we like it or not.

[ 38 : 26 ] God actually does not want us to bury our heads in the sand. He wants us to relate to this world and its people and its problems because it's his world and it's his people.

Do you ever think about those things when you pick up the morning paper and read about the downtown east side? Oh, I know. It's too big a problem, isn't it? I mean, we're all defeated by what we read about the section of Canada that has the worst postal code.

But you don't have to tackle the problem as a total, as a whole, or all by yourself. One member of our church has found a piece of it that she can work on.

She has joined the Genesis Project, which is attempting to provide a rescue for prostitutes with children who want to leave that kind of work and get reestablished away from pimps, away from drugs, and all the rest of it, Christians combined in a project.

That's perhaps an easier way to express your calling. Or what about the plight of refugees in Africa? Do you know that we've got two people in our congregation who have come from refugee camps in Africa?

[ 39 : 42 ] They sit three rows from the back at the 11 o'clock service, and both of them wear black and clerical collars. They are both ordained ministers, one from Burundi, one from the Sudan, and they are anxious to become a part of this congregation.

Go and talk to them. Shake their hand. They would be delighted. Very interesting people to know. And sometimes Emmanuel, who is the one from Sudan, will be picking up his children, two of his six children, or is it seven, that will come to Sunday school with them.

They want to become integrated in his congregation, whether or not they have contact with another congregation that they are ministering to themselves.

And we have other refugees, and I'm going to tell you about one, and I want you to write his name down, and I want you to pray for him as hard as you can, because he comes from Iran, where he converted to Christianity, and as a result, his life is in danger.

If he returns to Iran, and the Canadian government wants to send him back there, there are people that have told the government that he just says he's a Christian because he wants to stay here. Not true.

[ 41 : 05 ] But if you are a Christian in Iran, growing up in a Christian family, and it's your tradition, and we have one of those in our congregation who is an Assyrian Christian from Iran, they will leave you alone.

But leaving Islam is a no-no, and you will die, and nobody will prosecute the murderers. That wouldn't happen here, but it will happen there if he's made to return.

His name is Mehran, M-E-H-R-A-N, and God will know what his surname is, so don't worry about that. His hearing, the reason I'm asking you to do this is that there is a hearing with regard to an appeal about his refugee claim that is coming up before the end of this month.

So this is a time that we all need to be thinking and praying about Mehran. Well, I'm asking you, do you feel any relationship to some of these issues?

Perhaps we should all try looking at our world through God's eyes. It is not too late for us to make a difference. These examples that I'm giving you have sometimes been the result of cataclysmic things, all of them, but there are other personal changes which are much more normal and which also present new opportunities for God to work in your life.

[ 42 : 30 ] A new career. Widowhood. Retirement. All that free time that people think you're going to have when you retire. Parenthood.

Relocation. Marriage. Coming into an inheritance. I nearly said winning the lottery, but I wasn't sure that that would be a go in this group. Does God invite you into a new calling with any of these much more normal changes in your life?

Well, think about it. I have a friend who's father was a missionary in another part of the world for many years and he retired here to be closer to family. And subsequent to that, he had severe health problems which meant that his wife, who is also elderly, would not really be able to care for him at home.

And so he has gone into a care center where he may be for some time or he may be there for the rest of his life. This man has been relocated, but he has gone right on talking to people about Jesus.

He's just got a different audience. There's a man that doesn't have to retire from his job. God has just put him in a different place to do it. This talk would not be complete without a mention of the people who have volunteered and run into roadblocks set up by the church.

[ 43 : 50 ] We have a great many untapped resources in our church, for instance, and someday we may want to give that topic more attention in this group. But today I want to tell you about the experience of a couple who retired, there was an opportunity, moved to Vancouver Island, we still think of them as belonging to us, but they were hoping to give their energy to the local Anglican church.

I am going to quote, with permission, a letter outlining their experience in the New Parish. This is part of Ben Buen's very lengthy essay on the subject.

When they went to this Anglican parish, they found that sometimes sermons made scant reference to the scripture, Bibles were absent from the pews, and the rector actively discouraged the growth of small Bible study groups.

Concerned by what seemed some confused theology espoused by the rector on his Christmas Eve sermon, I asked to meet with him to gain more insight into his thinking and beliefs.

In particular, I wanted him to unbundle for me the meaning of statements in his homily such as this, this is a night of strangeness. Savor your unfathomable strangeness.

[ 45 : 07 ] Experience your complexity and improbability. yuck. Yuck. Took coin a phrase. Out of this meeting, I learned he did not believe in the divinity of Christ, he did not believe in the atonement, he did not believe Jesus was the way, the truth, and the life.

He told me he sympathized with that, but he had really no answer for those who concluded that Christ could have come to this earth with the intention of dying for our sins on the cross, since after all, any God who would sentence his son to such a fate would be guilty of cosmic child abuse.

Can you believe this is an Anglican minister? Believe it. Despite of now being aware of our rector's stunning lack of understanding of the scripture, we chose to stay.

Importantly for us, my wife's 90-year-old mother had attended the church for 35 years, and her father was buried there, and we made friends there. Every Sunday, the intercessory prayers called upon us to pray to God to help us maintain unity amidst our diversity.

There are times when that is too big a price to pay. On two occasions, we wrote to the rector, and once to him and his wardens, to express our concern over the issues as we saw them.

[ 46 : 36 ] The issues did not seem controversial or schematic to us, nor did we imagine that any reasonable person, even if they disagreed with us, could interpret our motives as wrongly as this church did.

The issues were a call for more exegetical preaching, Bibles in the pews, support for small Bible studies, and open and fair dialogue within the parish on the issue of same-sex blessings and the authority of scripture, and less emphasis on secular issues and more on scripture.

A little over a year after we had begun to attend the parish, we experienced what might best be described as an ecclesiastical drive-by shooting. We were asked to attend a meeting of the wardens and the archdeacon of the diocese.

The archdeacon read to us a letter signed by him and the wardens. Without any trace of irony, the archdeacon solemnly intoned that the letter and the meeting were both in the spirit of Matthew 18, 15 and 16, which is about resolving differences.

The letter went on to tell us that we had been accused, tried, and convicted of conduct that was quote, vexatious, or conduct that is known or ought reasonably be known to be unwelcome, and that our behavior had the effect of undermining, intimidating, humiliating, and demeaning our rector.

[ 48 : 06 ] The rector felt unsafe and was no longer able to offer us personal ministry. The letter went on to pronounce the sentence to be imposed on us.

My wife was asked to resign from the parish council, and we were asked to leave the parish. At the conclusion of the meeting, we were told by the rector's warden that the rector and his wife did not wish us to call them, write to them, email them, or come near their property, an edict more commonly reserved for stalkers and criminals.

In the circumstances, we chose to shake the dust off our sandals and leave the parish. This was written in January of this year. I saw them here at Easter time, Ben and Nancy, and I said, what are you going to do now, having already received this epistle, church?

And she said, well, we have a house group, we're actually thinking that maybe we would start a house church. I saw them again at the network meetings that we recently had, and said, how is this going?

Do you have a house church? And she said, yes, we're going to start with seven people and some assorted children, and we will have a minister as soon as the licensing takes place.

[ 49 : 36 ] So this is two weeks ago, and a lot of people were given licenses, including an Anglican minister called Joy Vernon, who came to this church the next day, and Joy has agreed to be their minister.

And so they were going to have a ceremony that would start the church. And I said, are you going to call it St. John's in the wilderness? And Joy said, we've had a number of suggestions, we don't quite know what we're going to call it.

Well, as our time draws to a close here, I think we should look at the St. John's people who have done better than the experience of the Buens, which is a total tragedy.

Look at the back of your sheet. Now these are six people to whom I put the question, how did you know that God was calling you to a certain task? Have you all gotten them figured out by now?

Yes? No? Maybe? Any suggestions about the first one? Who do you think it is?  
Somebody who has spoken at Learner's Exchange?

[ 50 : 44 ] Well, it's actually Jim Saladin. And he and his wife really were together at the time that he felt called to ministry.

And she was the one that told him first that she thought they were being called. And you'll notice that there are some life experiences that help to equip him for that. The second one on the list.

Now if you missed this one, you haven't been attending regularly at Learner's Exchange. Who is it? Think John Bunyan. Maxine, thank you.

It's Maxine. But the important thing that Maxine said to me in this little quote is that John Bunyan had been bred in my bones since childhood. Any of you who are parents and grandparents can have a tremendous effect on your kids if you expose them to the right literature and to the word of God.

from an early age. Now here we have a prosaic talent that has been offered to God by Glenn Howell.

[ 51 : 55 ] It could as easily have been Nora. Yes, thank you for that. It could as easily have been Nora who also feeds us. Glenn Howell doesn't think of himself as any kind of a missionary. But he's our chef Cordon Bleu or whatever and he cooks for discovering Christianity, exploring Christianity, Ecclesia.

He is in that kitchen I think four nights out of the week. He's not just a good cook but he doesn't believe that his gift has to do with leading those groups. He wants to prime the pump by making them all feel good before they get into the group.

Now who do we know in this next one? And there are clues there. Manya Edgerton. Yes, Manya Edgerton.

And you'll notice that she expresses some hesitation about whether or not she could do this. It's other people that think that she would have something to contribute here. And again I need to emphasize that we not only need to listen to each other but we also need to affirm each other if we see that somebody has a special talent or a gift that could be put to God's service.

We need to tell them maybe you are the messenger. Not an angel. Not a man in a vision. Maybe you are the messenger. Okay, the next one.

[ 53 : 23 ] The seed was planted fairly early in my life. Who is this? Any guesses? It's Sean Love.

It's Sean Love. Who had a successful career as a school teacher in Arizona before giving that up and coming back home to his home church and going into ministry.

And he is the minister of our Richmond Church and his church is one of the charter members of the network. And the last one.

There are some important clues here. Don Curry. Yes, it is. Thank you. It is.

And here was a man, you know, intent on going to Bangladesh. And I don't know, he didn't say to me how God convinced him to go to Pakistan instead. But he did say God gave me no peace until I realized that he had chosen a different place for me to go.

[ 54 : 26 ] well, I want you to go home and think about what God might be calling you to do and what God might be calling somebody else to do that you have noticed first.

And I want you to listen to the Holy Spirit the whole time. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.