

Bishop Simon - Everyday Faith - Christ Church, Sunday 3rd April 2022

Sometimes God pops up in the most unexpected of places. Last year, during the interminable lockdowns, we were going through our Netflix series and watched one called “Unbelievable”. It is not an easy watch for reasons I won't go into here. And it certainly isn't family viewing, but I was surprised earlier.

When it showed a piece of paper stuck to the police officer's car window, which set the words “Here I am send me.” You'll know those are the words spoken by Isaiah. When he has a vision of heaven, where God asks, who will go to speak and my name and Isaiah pops up and says, here I am send me, and then the crime drama, someone asked what the words mean, and the woman explains that she draws her inspiration to work as a police officer from the book of Isaiah on a TV series.

In fact, what follows is a great example of what it means to be a Christian in the workplace. You will know that Christians are often presented in film on TV as weird, slightly unhinged, or just as old-fashioned Bible bashers who are literally quoting scripture every second sentence. So, it was great to see this presentation of a woman who has faith in Jesus, but also does the tough work of law enforcement.

Personal Christian faith is often used as a lazy plot device, but it wasn't in this case right down to having them be in church on one occasion. And they were singing in “Christ alone”. When of course all we ever get on British TV because all we ever sing in church every single week is “all things bright and beautiful”.

In the New Testament, we're giving clear teaching on how important it is to live for Jesus, whatever it is you're doing. And trust me being ordained, the dog collar thing, it's tiny in the scheme of things, people are called to follow Jesus as mechanics, waiters, lawyers, recruiters, call centre operatives, nurses, childminders refuse collectors, models, soldiers, chefs, software coders, teachers, bus drivers, personal carers.

I could go on and on. Most importantly it covers what you do during the week. You may be paid for this. You may be a volunteer. Your work may be at home looking after children. It may be someplace else. You may be in full-time education or part-time education. Whatever it is, it matters greatly to God and our churches need to show this week by week.

That's why today I'm offering the opportunity to pray for anyone who wants to be prayed for in the role you have. To pray for you by name and to anoint you in this service. More of that in the moment thing is when we begin to see life this way, we start to realize that the Bible is full of stories of people going about their everyday work and how God positions himself in this, like the calming of the storm.

Now I have a cousin who is a trained sailor. She's a ship's captain. And she's told me all sorts of funny stories, because she does, has done the cross-channel ferries and the longer distance fairies, and so on all sorts of weird things that tourists do. There was one incident where somebody got onto a roll-on roll-off ferry to go to the continent, thinking that they were parking in the time centre multi-story car park.

They had to reverse off every single car behind this person to enable her to get off, to do her shopping in the town centre, delaying the ferry by two to three hours in the process that does raise questions for me about how you get through passport control. When all you're doing is going shopping on a Saturday, but that's what happened.

Now, my cousin loves really rough seas, but she did say seas can get out of control even so and be very scary. Jesus asked his friends to go with him on a boat across the sea of Galilee, which is not that long, a distance in a way. And then things started to get stormy. Have you ever been out at sea? I'm not going to get to stand up like Lynne did but put your hand up if you've been out at sea and it's been rougher than you're comfortable with.

That's a good proportion of the group that can put your hands down.

Have you ever been out at sea over night or one of the cross-channel, no not cross-channel but the longer distance ferries to going to Spain or something?

When it's been so rough and you're trying to sleep and you can't sleep, anybody else have that? Because what happens is you kind of fall asleep and then you're conscious, you know, in those moments of falling asleep think, I'm falling and you actually are falling because the waves are going down, the pillow is going down with you like that.

And then suddenly to rise up again, everything smacks against your face, and this wakes you up and it's really hard to stay asleep when that's happening. Now, I've been in big boats when that. Not the small boat that Jesus was in his friends, and many of them were fishermen started to panic. Where was Jesus? He was sound asleep that wasn't worrying him at all at the back of the boat.

So they came to him and I guess they had to shake him awake to get his attention. And then freakier still, for them, He says be still, and it just goes completely flat. Imagine being with someone who can do that kind of thing. And the funny thing, Jesus ends the story with a kind of an allegation. He has a word about them and says "Where was your faith? Did you really think you were going to go down with all hands? When there is included the yet to be pierced hands of mine?" That's quite a standard of faith they were being set.

And I don't know how I'd be in a major crisis when you think you might be about to die, you don't know until you get there. But the thing is Galilee, as well as being a lake, it was a workplace, and it was a workplace for quite a few of the people in that boat because they were.

And that's what it's like in life. Sometimes our homes and places of work where we are in public, suddenly stop being comfortable for us and become quite scary. And I think one of our tasks as Christians is when it gets like that is to think about the other person in the workplace, in the home, to be listening ears for people.

Because I think that when we listen, we can really respond to other people's needs and we can hear where God is in those needs, and we can help people. So, I just want to lay that before you, there will be times when it's a crisis for you or your work mates or your friends, and that might be right now.

And if so, Jesus is calling us to that level of faith that says trust in me because at the start of that story, he said, we're going to the other side of Galilee. And when the son of God says we're going to the other side of Galilee, you will get to the other side of Galilee. That is what we want to hold for our friends.

Right. What I'm going to do now is to offer this anointing for you. I'll have some baptism oil here, which I'm going to use. This is entirely up to you. If you don't want to come up. That is absolutely fine. It's not an expectation, but if you'd like prayer for in your life and what you do, could you come up, tell me your name, even if you think I know it.

My dad called me by my brother's name for 50 years. So cut me some slack here. It may be a family thing, so tell me your first name and what your role is, whatever it is, whether you're working or not what you're doing in life. And I will anoint you in the name of father, son, and holy spirit and pray for you.

And that this may take some time and I'm sorry it does. So, if you need to leave or to go off to do the activities that Lynne was talking about or get a drink that is fine. We're going to make this flexible now for a little time. But I'm in your hands and I will wear a mask and it will sanitize after each person and if queues tend to form, which is fine, but you may want to join the queue when you feel it's comfortably short enough.

Thank you very much. I spend a lot of time and pointing people to do this kind of job, to be a vicar. It's just great to anoint you to go out there and to live for Jesus. That's what it's all about. Thank you very much.