

Big Question2: Does God have a plan for me?

Sunday 18 January 2009

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Readings:

Exodus 2: 1 – 10

Matthew 4: 16 – 22

Sermon

Today we continue the series of sermons on looking at the 'big questions' that Brian started last week when he looked at the question 'Does God really care?'

Brian clearly showed last week that God really does care despite what we and the world in general think when we see a world in financial turmoil, a world where fighting continues in several regions and a world where there are millions who lack the basic necessities of life like food, drinking water, sanitation and shelter.

God cares; God cares passionately for every one of us. Although God's love and care is unconditional he does want us to care passionately for him – why? Because he has a plan for us!

I suppose I could end the sermon at this point, but I don't think that is what Brian intended when planning this series! So lets look at what we can learn from today's readings especially that from Exodus.

In today's world all too often people pass situations off as 'coincidence' or 'fate' rather than consider the possibility of some 'superior' being – God's hand being at work!

One could pass off this well known story of the baby Moses in the papyrus basket as merely a series of coincidences:

- Was it coincidence that this baby was born at the time Pharaoh had issued an edict that all new born Hebrew male babies were to be killed?
- Was it coincidence that this mother decided to hide her baby for three months to prevent him being killed?
- Was it coincidence that she had the idea getting a papyrus basket waterproofing it then placing her baby in it and hiding it among the reeds?
- Was it coincidence that the baby's sister hid to watch what would happen to her baby brother?
- Was it coincidence that Pharaoh's daughter chose this spot to bathe?
- Was it coincidence that she spotted the basket hidden among the reeds?
- Was it coincidence that the baby's sister had the confidence to approach Pharaohs' daughter and ask if she wanted her to find a wet nurse for the baby?

- Was it coincidence that Pharaoh's daughter readily accepted this suggestion?
- Was it coincidence that when the child grew older Pharaoh's daughter accepted the baby she now called Moses as her own son?
- And was it by some strange coincidence that God later chose Moses from all the Hebrew men?

This would be an impressive series of coincidences for any one believing in coincidences to explain events happening around them!

If we look at the gospel reading one could ask was it through fate or coincidence that Jesus came across these fishermen and called them to follow him and they did.

No, these events were not coincidences they were all part of God's master plan. God does not work through coincidences!

God had a plan and Moses, this Hebrew baby boy was an essential character in that plan! This harmless, helpless baby boy was to be the means by which God would rescue his chosen people from the slavery and bondage of life in Egypt.

Jesus and his disciples were also all part of God's plan for it was through Jesus that God would ultimately save mankind from sin.

The baby Moses was to be educated and trained as a member of the royal family, he would be trained as a warrior and as a leader – but he was to be used by God and not the Egyptians as a leader.

Jesus too was to spend his early years in Egypt before returning to Israel where he was brought up as a member of a humble god fearing family. He was not trained in the same way as Moses was but he was to develop into a great leader – the greatest ever seen!

It would be several years before God called Moses to lead the Israelites out of Egypt and by then he had already shown his fighting prowess when he took matters into his own hands.

First Moses killed an Egyptian who was beating one of the Hebrew slaves and as a consequence he had to flee from Egypt to Midian.

Later he was to rescue the daughters of a Midian priest when some shepherds drove them away from the well where they were trying to draw water for their father's flock.

When the time was right God called Moses to lead the Hebrews out of Egypt and when it was the right time Jesus started his ministry spreading the good news of salvation – and at the right time Jesus was to die on the cross, the ultimate sacrifice for man's sin!

The majority of the crucial figures used by God throughout both the Old and New Testaments as part of his master plan were just ordinary people – people like Abraham, Moses, Samuel and David in the OT and people like the disciples, Paul and Timothy in the NT.

God still continues to use ordinary people to do his work in the world today! Our calling may not be as obvious as that of the bible characters I have mentioned but God needs us! God has a plan for each of us:

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29: 11)

So how do we know what is God's plan for us? The answer has to be through prayer and through listening to God, but also listening to other members of Christ's family.

Our gifts and calling may be more obvious to others than it is to ourselves! E.g. when I started reader training a friend at St James said to me 'About time I wondered when you would answer God's call!'

How do we know when we are called, when God's plan for us needs activating? Again my own experience is that it becomes obvious – sometimes slowly other times more rapidly! Things just seem to drop into place things that at first may just seem to be one of those coincidences – but later one sees the plan being revealed.

I first looked at training as a reader many years ago but although I preached and led services regularly nothing came of it. It wasn't until 1999 that I felt the calling again and so discussed this with Brian.

At that time I worked very long days leaving home at around 6.30 in the morning and usually not getting home until 8 or even 9 at night. I knew that as I worked flexi-hours I could make time for study by working a 4 day week leaving one for studying.

But not long afterwards out of the blue I was 'offered' early retirement on terms that if offered to the rest of the office everyone would have left! A colleague asked how come only I had been offered early retirement and he was a little surprised when I said that there must have been a helping hand from above!

What are we called to do, what is God's plan for us? Again I think this will become clear one way or another. Back in 1999 I found that the way was made obvious! I felt called to readership ministry but it was suggested that I look at training as a non-stipendiary minister – something I had never considered before.

But it was soon obvious that was not the plan God had for me because although interested and encouraged by several people things did not go well. From the outset there were obstacles put in the way and to say the least I became frustrated when told it would be at least another year before I could start training - even if selected!

It was only when I turned back to the original plan that everything ran well and I was accepted for reader training in a matter of days!

What do we do when we are called - when we think we know the plan God has for us? Firstly we need to continue to pray about it and discuss it with Brian or other members of the church family. If all this confirms our belief then we need to get on with following that plan.

But can we refuse to follow God's plan for us? Certainly because God only wants willing workers, workers whose hearts and minds are devoted to the task he has given them.

However it can be difficult to ignore God! Remember Jonah? Called by God to go to Nineveh and preach against it. What did Johan do? Run away and caught a boat to Tarshish.

But God intervened and after being thrown overboard Jonah was swallowed by a whale and brought back to dry land. This time when told to go to Nineveh he obeyed!

God doesn't call everyone to be readers, or pastoral assistants, or evangelists or ministers. God's plan for us might be something quite simple but nevertheless just as important to his overall plan! God may simply wish us to minister where we are – that might be at home, with friends or neighbours or at work.

It may be helping people in need because they are sick or unwell, helping with shopping etc. Whatever it is it is essential work for the Lord and we should do it with a willing heart and to the best of our abilities!

Whatever God's plan for us he will ensure we have the necessary skills to do his work. It doesn't need much from us to accomplish his plan for our lives provided we focus on God and trust him – that is all he needs to begin his work in our lives.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. (Jeremiah 29: 11)