

Growing Together: Personality

We have some very beautiful readings this morning which hopefully remind us that we are each precious and unique in God's sight. When we began this exercise we explored how our spiritual gifts, our passions, and our abilities are part of how we are called by God into the fullness of our lives and our vocation. Now it may be hard enough to see ourselves as gifted, passionate and able to do and be much of anything. But at least these were positive aspects of our makeup.

As we begin to focus outward and include our whole personality as part of who we are and who God wants then we are talking about the all of us, the whole of us being known, loved and called by God. And that is a little less comfortable or even fathomable.

Of all the things that could be said about personality and vocation I want to focus on just three things. Firstly that we are each unique. This is conveyed in the language of being called by name and the image of having been searched out and known since being knit together in our mother's womb. And that means that we are known, loved, and called not in spite of who we are but as we are, because we are who we are. In all our unique difference and all our similarity to others we are known, loved and called to be part of God's kingdom. We come in various shapes and sizes and that is the way God intended things.

If we are of an artistic personality then that is how we are created and the church needs musicians, arrangers of flowers, crafters of words and wood and stone and brass, bakers of great taste that we may see and touch the beauty of God. If we are of an intuitive mystic nature then that is how we are created and the church needs its mystics, its writers of liturgy, and its prayerful night watchers who listen to the invisible and eternal and help us all stay open to the spiritual. If we are of an orderly mind and can see the pattern of history, of expenditure, of cause and effect then that is how we are created and the church needs its keepers of books and knowledge. And if you are of a warrior nature then that is how we are created and the church needs its defenders and its advocates for the needs of the poor and outcast. The only criteria, the only caveat is that our personality is to be subject to our creator not our ego or some more temporary endeavour – it is our true nature that we are called to.

The second thing I think our readings point us toward is that our personality is unfolding and growing, from when we are in our mother's womb to the moment we enter into eternity and who knows beyond that – maybe we still have some unfolding to do even beyond death?!

We may recognise as observers of ourselves and others, that while we remain who we are we also change over time. Some of it due to normal life stages and the sheer passing of time and some of it change that is due to hurt and damage and intentional seeking of healing and development. Last week I reminded us of the biblical images of pruning as part of our development of abilities.

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Based on Isaiah 43:1-4; Psalm 139:1-16; Philippians 1:3-11; and Matthew 10:26-30.

Likewise our personalities are formed and reformed by the trial and triumphs of life, the waters that nearly cover us over, and the fire that we must walk through.

And thirdly that the all of us, the all of our personality is known, loved and called into God's service. I have to say that part of me is still hesitant to say this – that the parts of my nature I find quirky, embarrassing, poor quality, broken, or just very ordinary are somehow part of how God wants me to be present and of service.

If I may share. Part of my personality is a rather dark sense of humour, no doubt shaped by years of working around trauma and rather graphic violence and injury – physical and psychological to the human person. And my humour can get me into trouble and I try and keep a bit of a muzzle on it and be a bit selective about when and where I share it. But like most personality traits it loves to raise its head when I think least convenient. I remember when I was doing some training as a chaplain I went to see a very sweet elderly woman patient. And we had politely been having a nice conversation. Feeling a little bit stuck and bored I asked how she had received her injuries. She said that she had tried to move her television set but that its castors had jammed on a mat and somehow the big heavy set had fallen on her and broken her hip. And before I could edit the words they were out of my lips "Sort of suicide by TV?" She blinked for a moment and then laughed. We then spoke a little more freely and suddenly she was sobbing and telling me how her 45 year old son had committed suicide just two years before. After sobbing for some minutes she told me that she had not spoken of it since the funeral as her family did not want to dwell on it. When I told my spiritual director how mortified I was that I would have been so clumsy and caused such pain to be remembered she told me that on the other hand she was delighted that I had left my professional manner behind and somehow allowed by own personality and the spirit to find its way to a real meeting with someone who desperately needed permission to talk about suicide. And so in the end it was my real and somewhat dubious self and not my professional cleverness that God used in that moment to give comfort to someone. And I have certainly been countless times on the receiving end of some rough but real tenderness and truth telling that was just what I needed.

What is in the shadows of our own personality, what is whispered may well need to be shouted or sung and to see the light of day. God wants all of us. Certainly what is beautiful and gifted but just maybe what is lumpy and embarrassing and broken and very ordinary about us as well. And as we give who we truly are to God and God's good purposes we shall be formed and reformed, we shall be mended and worn smooth, healed and broken open so that we are truly unique and beautiful.

Even so, come Lord Jesus Christ.