

Smiths' Service Sermon 23 February 2025

1 Samuel 3:1-11

John 1:1-14

- 1. Opening Prayer:** Living God, we pray for your blessings on the Worshipful Company of Smiths and for what they represent and achieve within our community.
- 2. Setting the Scene:** As with the previous eleven occasions when I have acted as your Chaplain, I have avoided using previous Bible readings and will try not to repeat what I have said on a previous occasion. My aim is to remind us of the central tenets of our faith; to relate what we are and represent to scripture; and then finally to place what we do and represent in the wider perspective of human experience.
- 3. My first challenge** is to try to explain what our two readings mean to us in spiritual terms and also for us as Smiths.
- 4. Our First Reading from Samuel** is all about his 'calling' from God when he was a boy. His mother had basically presented him to the Temple as an act of faith but he did not initially recognise the 'call' from God. He needed Eli to explain to him what was happening. From this small incident one of the major figures of the Bible emerges and becomes very influential in terms of the faith of the people of his time.
- 5. Our Second Reading is from John:** this statement of our core faith was composed by a man who was very close to Jesus and was probably written very late in his life. This means that he had reflected on what he had seen and experienced. This short statement draws together all the different strands of Christian belief, everyone from evangelical fundamentalists to extreme liberals. The words may mean different things to that very disparate audience but it does declare a shared belief in God, even if some may define God differently from others.
- 6. Combining the effect of these two readings** we have the 'building blocks' of a background as to why we are here today. We have this sense of someone being 'called' and a reminder of what is at the core of our belief.
- 7. Of course, we may not individually or collectively feel that we have been 'called'** in what we do but we have to understand that our 'calling' is based on

our inherent skill and capabilities. It is those skills and capabilities that we are here to celebrate today. Many Smiths have lived with an awareness of a particular creative or productive skill. In my terms that is a gift from God, in effect a 'call' from God, just as valid as that heard and received by Samuel. Everyone has inherent skills and we need encourage everyone to make the best of their skills. That is why the Worshipful Company of Smiths each year offer and award grants to apprentices embarking on their own 'calling' into a specific skill pathway. Last year the impromptu collection at this annual service was donated to the Rotary-supported Tools for Self-Reliance charity to contribute to their education programme for apprentices in Africa. This Christian-based charity was inspired by Archbishop Trevor Huddleston who believed that encouraging self-help was the way to solve the problems of inequality in Africa. This year it has been agreed that we will support Tools for Self-Reliance again this year, so please think about what can be achieved with young women and men in its African apprenticeship schemes when you pass the collection receptacle when you leave.

- 8. What is our core Belief?** Last year I guided you to reflect on the Beatitudes – 'blessed are the meek etc' – and there are other central passages of scripture which can guide us into trying to live out the message of 'good neighbourliness' declared by Jesus; or we could go back into the Old Testament and reflect on the words of the 'Ten Commandments'. All point us back to our core belief which is an awareness of the presence and influence of God in our world here on Earth. It was that feeling that led me back to the beginning of St John's Gospel. In that passage we are reminded of the eternal and continuing presence of God. People of my generation were much influenced by the teaching of people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Bishop John Robinson as they tried to guide us into a closer understanding of the nature of God and the immediacy of his presence. I am always most insistent in my teaching that the reality is that we all believe individually and there will be differences in how we hold that belief but St John reminds us that we are all drawn together by the message – the 'Word' of God. We also need to appreciate that the World changes and people's levels of capability and awareness are conditioned by the times in which they live. What we need to do is to keep ourselves open to the 'Word' or 'call' of God: it may not be what we expect but it will always be within our capabilities.
- 9. My final thought is this:** what else can we be doing in God's name? My belief is that being faithful means that we accept a call to action. It is what I label Christian action: it is living out that American epithet – What would Jesus have done? This is the explanation for many of the things that some of us do – fund-raising for local charities, our local collection of redundant spectacles for Africa,

indeed supporting Tools for Self-Reliance or our local support for young people in apprenticeships. It is something for us to ponder.

10. My final prayer is this: Living God, we pray that we may be your agents as we live out the implications of your eternal message.