

We heard last night of Jeremiah's call to be a prophet and today we hear of this call to Isaiah and, albeit briefly, to David and, principally of course, to John the Baptist, even in the womb. The Oxford Dictionary of English defines this, call, this vocation as, firstly, 'a strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation' but this is obviously not its original sense as understood by these Old Testament figures as each feels distinctly unworthy of this call from God, taking Zechariah's response to speak for John the Baptist, and his son's subsequent awareness of not being worthy to undo even the strap of Jesus' sandal, as evidence for John. No, the sense of call is met not with 'that's the job for me' but rather, 'My God, my God, why have you chosen me?' And it's clear from the very beginning:

*And now the Lord has spoken  
he who formed me in the womb to be his servant  
to bring Jacob back to him  
to gather Israel to him.*

And, as Augustine sensed, this beginning, this call, goes back to that very first call, the Word which brings creation into being, so that John's sense of unworthiness – if it is that – is indeed justified for he is in the presence of the God and creator of all things. When John leaps in the womb, it is a recognition that his source of life lies in Mary as much as in his own mother, Elizabeth. This isn't mere romanticising but significant of where everyone's vocation truly lies. We are not here for our own ends only, but when we 'consider God's call' the irony or paradox is not then of a sense of unworthiness but that everyone is worthy because we are all called by God. So perhaps the Oxford Dictionary of English is right, after all, albeit unwittingly, for we are all called to have 'a strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation' as children of God. And all of us, in this sense, are predestined to speak of Christ. This is faith as 'allowing God's power true play in us.'

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