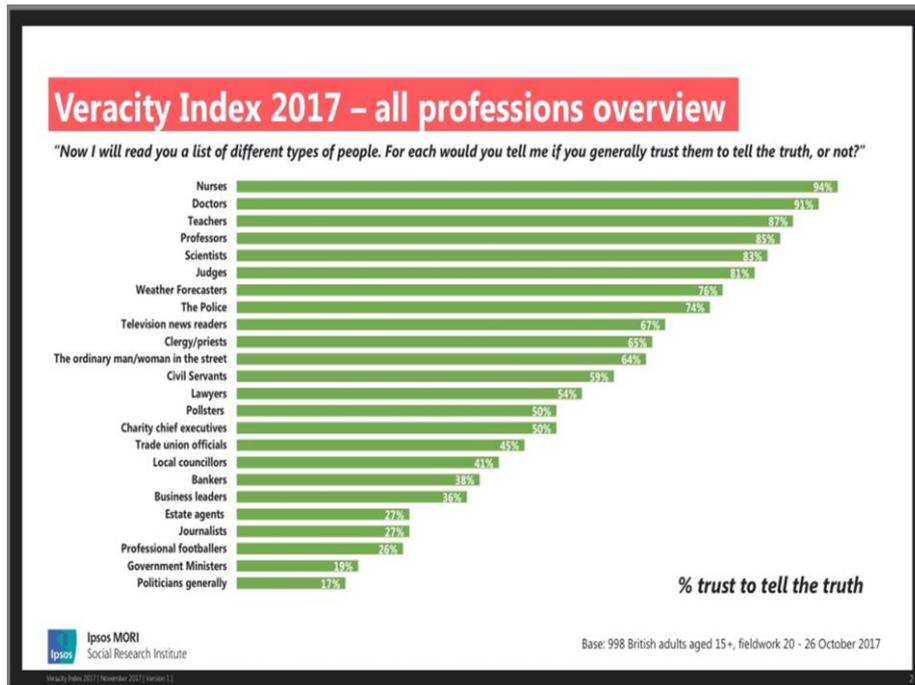




Trust and Trustability : Transformed by the Spirit 1 Sam.9:27-10:8 J. Keir-Bucknall Sunday 16th September 2018

Who do you trust? Tom asked this when he launched this series of talks entitled “Trust and Trustability”. In today’s society it’s hard to know who to trust. The news is full of scandals - people caught out having lied or cheated, abused their position, failed to meet our expectations. So who do you trust? Your “significant other” (husband, wife or partner)? Your “bff” (best friend forever)? Someone in your LG? Our vicar?



Each year the market research company, MORI, publish their findings on which professions are perceived to be the most trusted. The ordinary man/woman is trusted by 64% of those surveyed:

- Doctors 91% (nurses are highest at 94%!)
- Politicians 17% (but at least our local councillors are higher, at 41%)
- Teachers 87%
- Clergy 65% (almost certainly pulled down by the stories in the news) Trust takes years to build, seconds to break and a lifetime to repair.

These past couple of weeks, we’ve been looking at the events recorded in the OT book of 1 Samuel - the beginning of a time of tremendous upheaval for the Israelite nation - a time which would see them change from being a theocracy (a nation trusting in God) to a monarchy (trusting in a King).

- We met Eli, a high priest at the time of the Judges, a religious leader, who started well in a close relationship with God but then fell foul, failing to address the ungodly behaviours of his own sons.
- We’ve met Samuel, a prophet, dedicated to God by his mother Hannah; very much a man of prayer and integrity but sadly not reflected in his sons.
- And today we meet Saul, a Benjamite, and the handsome son of Kish, who was a wealthy and prominent land owner in Israel. In fact we are told that Saul was “as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else.” (v2)

One day some of the family donkeys went missing, and Saul and his servant were tasked to find them. After several days with no sign of the donkeys, they decided to seek help from the prophet Samuel, who unbeknownst to them, had already been primed by God to be on the lookout for the one He had chosen to be the first king of Israel. So when Samuel and Saul crossed paths, it was all part of God's plan and we pick up the story when Samuel breaks the news to Saul...

1 Samuel 9:27 - 10:8 *"As they were going down to the edge of the town, Samuel said to Saul, "Tell the servant to go on ahead of us"—and the servant did so—"but you stay here for a while, so that I may give you a message from God. Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the LORD anointed you ruler over his inheritance? When you leave me today, you will meet two men near Rachel's tomb, at Zelzah on the border of Benjamin. They will say to you, 'The donkeys you set out to look for have been found. And now your father has stopped thinking about them and is worried about you. He is asking, "What shall I do about my son?" ' "Then you will go on from there until you reach the great tree of Tabor. Three men going up to worship God at Bethel will meet you there. One will be carrying three young goats, another three loaves of bread, and another a skin of wine. They will greet you and offer you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from them. "After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, timbrels, pipes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying. The Spirit of the LORD will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you. "Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do.""*

Wow! Imagine being in Saul's shoes when Samuel tells him that God, has chosen him to be Israel's first king! It's not a message he can easily dismiss - after all, it's from the greatly trusted and respected prophet, Samuel... who promptly anoints him with oil and kisses him, confirming God's call on his life ..and his own personal support. Anointing with oil was used to consecrate something, to set it aside for God, such as the items used in the Temple sacrifices. In the same way, prophets and priests were anointed with oil showing they were chosen by God for a particular work of service. This was the first anointing though of a king and showed that the monarchy was to be established as a legitimate or divine institution. As with many events in the OT, the act of anointing Saul as king, pointed forward to Jesus, the Messiah - a word which actually means "the Anointed One." Jesus, fully human, fully divine - called to be our prophet and priest and king.

I wonder what Saul made of the news. I wonder if he trusted Samuel implicitly at that moment.. or perhaps as would we, if he thought he'd just got the wrong man. When God calls though, He confirms ... and for Saul, no doubt the very much needed confirmation came in the form of a series of very specific prophetic signs. Verses 2 to 5 give precise detail about who Saul would meet - two men near Rachel's tomb, then three men going up to worship God at Bethel - one carrying three goats, another three loaves of bread, and the 3rd a skin of wine etc. Talk about SMART targets! These were certainly specific and measurable signs.. and could be easily checkedand all did indeed check out, exactly as Samuel described! We're told in v10 that " all these signs were fulfilled that day." Saul was left in no doubt that God had chosen him.

The act of anointing someone with oil was a visible symbol of an internal transformation - the person being filled with the Holy Spirit, being equipped or empowered by God for service. In the OT, only particular people were filled with the Spirit for particular purposes at particular times. For example:

- in Exodus 35:34-35 we are told that both Bezalel and O'holiab were filled by the Holy Spirit with "the ability to teach others. He has filled them with skill to do all kinds of work as engravers, designers, embroiderers" a handy skill set for building and decorating the sanctuary in the Temple!
- in Deuteronomy (34:9) we find Joshua, was filled with the Spirit of wisdom - very useful in leadership - a lot more needed to sort out Brexit!
- and the prophet Micah declares, "But as for me, I am filled with power, with the Spirit of the LORD, and with justice and might, to declare to Jacob his transgression, to Israel his sin." (Micah 3:8) ...

In v6 here, Samuel tells Saul, that the Spirit of the Lord will come powerfully upon him and that he will be changed into a different person... and in verses 9 and 10 we read how this prophecy was fulfilled that same day! Saul was filled with the Spirit and God changed his heart. He was filled with the Spirit and God changed his heart. Has that happened to you? Have you been filled with the Holy Spirit? Has your heart been changed...or are you not sure? You may not have been chosen to be a king, like Saul or called to lead a momentous nation changing event like Saul... but if you have accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour, (like our 5 young people last week!) you also have been called by God and you have been filled with the Holy Spirit!

I want to look at three phases of Saul's calling and in the light of these, share what the Lord has placed on my heart for us today.



Prepared
to serve

Called
to serve

Equipped
to serve

PREPARED to serve - The first is that we are prepared to serve. I am often reminded that "Nothing is wasted in God's economy"; our family background, our life circumstances, and our specific talents and gifts all have a purpose in God's plan. Every experience (good or bad), every encounter (however seemingly random), every trial and tribulation is used by God to mold us, refine us into the person and for the purposes for which he has created us. I find that reassuring. God can make a masterpiece out of my mess!

I know that God did not cause my marriage to fail and for me to raise my kids as a single parent - yet these events led to a complete career change for me - from IT into education. His perfect plan wasn't to give my dad dementia, or to strain our family relationships. However, I know He has been with me in each difficult moment and He has used each circumstance, to grow different skills in me... and so I've been able to come alongside and support others who have faced similar family difficulties. As we are told in Ephesians 2:10 we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

So when things are hard, we need to remember that God has everything in hand, even when we can't see how. One of my go-to verses is Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

What have your experiences prepared you for? Who can you serve out of what you've learned?

CALLED to serve - God not only prepares us to serve, God also calls us to serve. Every Christian is called to serve. We read in 1 Peter 4:10: "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. God has given each of us skills and gifts, and he calls us to be faithful in serving others with them. The place and the way we serve may be very different - some for a whole lifetime such as a Saul as king or Samuel as priest - others may change with the different seasons of life - perhaps nurturing a young family to know and love Jesus, helping in a youth group or witnessing at work or being an engineer and then hearing the call to be a vicar..... or even being a HT and then.... well, who knows... Our giftings grow as we cultivate them and so the way we serve may well change as the Lord calls us according to His plan, not ours...and in His timing, not ours!

After all, since God has designed us, He knows best how to use us and He uses our every day circumstances and encounters to connect us to the right people to hear his call, when He wants us to hear it. The trouble is, we don't always take the time to really listen do we, and so we often spend our time frustrated, or feeling unsettled and wondering what it is we're being called to do! Julian Richards at NW Wales in June, when talking about trying to identify our personal calling, suggested we should reflect upon what it is that gives us a sense of fulfilment - and I would then ask, when doing it, is God glorified? If the answer is yes, it's a good indication that God might be calling us to serve in that particular area. Mind you, even when we do hear God's call, we may try to dismiss it, because it seems ridiculous or because we feel totally inadequate. That's when we need to remember phase 3 - when God calls us, we can trust Him to equip us for the work involved.

EQUIPPED to serve - Saul was one of those handful of people in OT times, chosen to be filled with the Spirit for a particular purpose and time. But we live in the time prophesied by Joel when God said, ""And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days." (Joel 2:28-29). The apostle John also reminded the early Gentile believers - in 1 John 2:20 - that as Christians under the new covenant, we "have an anointing from the Holy One" We are filled with and blessed by the Holy Spirit. We are called to serve God, but not in our own strength - "Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit," says the LORD Almighty. (Zechariah 4:6) We can't do God's work without God's Spirit. And as a Christian, let's not forget that the Spirit is given to each of us, to sanctify us, to help us live in faith everyday, to help us submit increasingly to Christ as our Lord, so that His image is reflected more and more in every aspect of what we do and say and even think. We "are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit." - a wonderfully awesome verse in 2 Corinthians 3:18.

I would like to finish by issuing a challenge, to respond to the Spirit within you...



- 1) Open your eyes - to see the hand of God in your every day life - to recognise those “in the right place just at the right moment” situations, those “just happened to bump into” encounters, those “God-incidents” that others would dismiss as mere coincidents. These give us glimpses of the preparations God is making in us and for us and should increase our faith that He is with us in all things.
- 2) Open your ears - to hear God’s call, the promptings that can guide our steps into the perfect plans he has for us... but that means we must prioritise time to be still and listen and then respond in obedience.
- 3) Open your heart - to trust God, to trust that He loves you beyond compare, that has transformed you by His Spirit and will equip you for whatever work He is calling you to...and may God receive all the praise and all the glory as we serve.

Amen!