

# The calling to be an ordinary mystic

Pitt Street Uniting Church, Sunday 9 February 2023

A Reflection by Rev Dr Karina Kreminski

Epiphany 5C

Isaiah 6: 1-8; Luke 5 1-11

This worship service can be viewed on You Tube at <https://pittstreetuniting.org.au/spirit/reflections/>

---

Theologian Karl Rahner once claimed: *“The Christian of the future will be a mystic or will not exist at all.”*

What do you think, see and feel when you hear the word mystic? Perhaps you have a positive reaction or maybe you don't like the term mystic. It might conjure up visions of someone sitting on a cloud far removed from the everyday troubles and issues of life and of not much use to anyone. From what I understand, Rahner meant that people who believe in some kind of God will either have an intimate and experiential relationship with God, or they will be without faith. I realise that this sounds a little polarising but what I wanted to focus on in Rahner's comment is this need to have an intimate, dynamic and experiential relationship with God. Would you describe your connection with God as intimate, dynamic and experiential?

As I read our passage for reflection today a few things stood out to me. I love the casual nature of Jesus in this story. We read that he is speaking, teaching the word of God it says by the lakeside. Jesus is not in a temple, he prefers the outdoors and seems to draw people to himself, people hungry for wisdom, hope in this life. They all want to hear him. Often in the gospels the crowd is presented as frustrated, fickle, oppressed, troubled, sick and searching. Jesus is meeting people where they are, by the water, on the mountaintop, on the streets. So this is in a way a very ordinary scene. And Jesus initiates here and begins to draw in these unsuspecting fishermen. Again, men who were just doing their everyday activity and work. Simply making a living. Jesus gets into one of their boats and starts to teach. So Jesus is very informal, grounded and engaged with people in their everyday lives.

Jesus represents the presence and power of God in the Gospels. And what I love about this story is that the presence and power of God is brought to earth in a very grounded, ordinary and casual way. In a sense there is no mysticism here - in the way we normally think of it. Instead, we see the presence and power of God encountering human beings where they are at in their everyday working lives.

Are you aware of the presence of God in your everyday life? What does that look like for you? Ever since becoming aware of the book *Practicing the Presence of God*, written by Brother Lawrence, a monk living in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, which I'm sure you have read about, I have tried to see God in the everyday. Brother Lawrence would encounter God in simple things like washing the dishes in the monastery and he wrote about that. It seems to me that this is where we can find God - in the ordinary stuff of life. Since God put on flesh through Jesus, all things have been made sacred. Our flesh, our work, the stuff of life is holy. I like what spiritual teacher Mirabai Starr has to say on this. She says:

*“One of the things it means to be an ordinary mystic is to bow at the feet of your everyday existence, with its disappointments and dramas, its peaceful mornings and luminous nights, and to honor yourself just as you are.... A mystic finds the magic in the midst of the nitty-gritty, the crusty spaghetti sauce pot in the sink and the crocus poking out of a spring snowfall, the unsigned divorce papers on the kitchen table and the results of your latest blood work on your computer screen.”*

I like the term ordinary mystic. We find God in and around us just as we are. We find God in the beauty, in the terror and in the mundane stuff of life. So in this story we are reading today I see a very ordinary and mundane yet intimate interaction between the presence of God and human beings.

If we continue to read on in this story, we also see that Jesus asks something of Peter the fisherman. Jesus asks him to cast his net deeper into the water. Peter protests but does it because he has some level of respect for Jesus. He of course has no idea about the identity of Jesus, just that there is something he respects about this wandering spiritual teacher or rabbi. So we read that Peter casts out his net and catches at that moment an enormous amount of fish even though he has been fishing all night and caught nothing. Peter then discerns that something strange, wonderful and extraordinary is happening, so he bows at the feet of Jesus. The story says he and the other fishermen were astonished.

Peter is able to see that something unusual is happening. He has the discernment to perceive that something extraordinary is happening. He could have waved it away as coincidence, good timing on Jesus' part or clever fishing techniques. But instead he discerns, he sees with the eyes of his heart perhaps that what is happening is wonderful or full of wonder. Has this ever happened to you? Perhaps we could say this is how we define typically mystical – being able to discern unusual moments of some kind of supernatural encounter. I think that those moments come more frequently than we think. But we need eyes and ears to see that and not simply rationalise those moments away. Those moments don't have to be spectacular. I mean really, catching a lot of fish is not really that unusual or spectacular is it? But it's about those little encounters, those small, strange coincidences that cannot be explained away – those micro moments could be the presence, power and energy of God revealing itself to us.

I was reading an article recently that was saying that more people are becoming interested in spiritual things today. After Modernity and the Enlightenment, which brought to us an emphasis on rationality and efficiency, people are now looking for wonder, enchantment and mystery. And it seems to be happening more and more with the younger generation who are increasingly open to spiritual language and activities. Perhaps we need to get more comfortable with this? Do we have eyes to see the presence and power of God in the midst of the ordinary stuff of life?

We see in this story that some kind of encounter and exchange happens between Peter and Jesus. In her book *Church of the Wild*, author Victoria Loorz says that up until the fourth century, theologians and bishops and translators consistently translated the Greek word Logos as sermo. Sermo means conversation.

So she makes a fascinating proposal. We read in John 1:1 that in the beginning was the word or Logos. She would translate that as in the beginning was the sermo or conversation. She believes that God is conversation, in other words a dialogue and relationship entered into with humanity. In the beginning was God – the conversation. When you enter into a conversation with someone there is a mutuality, an openness to being impacted and transformed, changed. You are never the same after a real conversation.

It seems to me that this is what happened between Peter and Jesus in this story. Peter was transformed and changed through a conversation with Jesus – he had an encounter with Jesus. An encounter of the ordinary mystic perhaps. And my view is that Jesus was also impacted by his encounter with Peter. Perhaps this encounter confirmed in Jesus a desire to call Peter to follow him as a disciple. Whenever we have those moments of encounter with the presence, power and energy of God there is a transformation, a change in us.

If we have eyes to see God in the ordinary this has the potential to leave us impacted and altered. And I think this looks more like a conversation than anything else. Perhaps it is a moment of reflection in nature where we see the beauty of this earth. And this leaves us affected as we internally converse with this presence or beauty we are encountering, we pay attention and we get curious, we ask questions. An inner dialogue happens and, before we know it, we have encountered God in the everyday. Or maybe it is in the midst of the mess of life – an argument, a struggle, a grief or hurt. God is there too for that mystical yet ordinary conversation. If we have eyes to see and hear, God is there.

At the end of the story that we are reading, Jesus tells Peter that from now on he will not only catch fish but he will catch people. So there has been a shift for Peter. No longer will Peter see things from a surface level but he is going to begin a deeper life, he will see things from a depth, a greater calling and dimension. I think this is our calling too.

We are called to see and live life from a deeper place. We are called to care more deeply, to love and grieve for our world more deeply. While some might be indifferent to violence or injustice in our world we are to call that out. When people are unkind and lacking mercy we are to show mercy to the stranger. We are to speak truth and be kind.

This passage and story is usually given the title “*Jesus calls his first disciples*”. Ultimately it is not about the call to join a church, or the call to become a minister in the church. It is the call for all of us to discern God, to become ordinary mystics, to discern the power, presence and energy of God in the ordinary stuff of life.

And as we perceive these everyday sacred flashes and glimmers, our deeper calling and mission is to impact and change the world – to be salt and light in a world that we see is full of trouble.