

Called by God

We've been looking at a number of famous people when they were young, and trying to guess who they are and why they were so famous. I wonder as those children were growing up, did they fully realize the impact that they would make on society and indeed the world? It's amazing to think that they were just like you and me when we were young, growing up with all of the world in front of them, not realising the amazing things ahead of them. So it's no different for any of us today - as we grow up, think about the incredible potential that there is within every one of us to make a positive impact in this world.

Now there were 2 sets of photos that I didn't put up on the screen which I want to show you now. See if you know who this first person is :

Let me give you some clues about this person to help you :

1. This person was born in Ballymoney
2. This person is very fit
3. This person works in the Fire Service

Yes, this is in fact Ian Heaney, our BB captain

And Ian when he was growing up certainly didn't know that he would become the Captain of the Boys Brigade, and yet God had other plans for him. In fact God planned for Ian to be BB Captain even before Ian was born.

So here's another picture to guess Let me again give you some clues to help guess who this is :

1. This person has an older brother
2. This person was born in Lisburn
3. This person is a musician

Yes, this is in fact me, and I am your minister

Certainly as I grew up I had no intention of being a minister. In fact my first couple of jobs were

working in IT, and then in the last 15 years God had plans for me to retrain and be a minister.

The potential that is within this room today is incredible, especially if it is all used to bring positive change for the future.

X-Men

How many of you have ever seen the X-Men movies? In the films we discover people who are living on earth but who have amazing powers and gifts. The problem in the movie is that the society around these people look at them as strange, different and even scary. As a result these people with special powers are treated unfairly and are even persecuted.

Charles Xavier is one of those people who are gifted with amazing powers, but who are mistreated badly, but he doesn't allow this to anger him. He fights against it. In fact, he decides to become "Dr. X," a force for good in the world. He invites another friend, Erik Lensherr, to join him, saying, "You have a chance to become a part of something much bigger than yourself." But Lensherr refuses and becomes a villain named 'Magneto'.

Recognising the powers and gifts of many young people, Dr X starts a school to develop these children to ensure their powers are used for the good of society. And yet whilst there is a chance for good there is always Magneto lurking around to channel all this power to destroy and control.

And there is something very similar when it comes to us and what God has made us to be. In every one of us, God sees an incredible potential to bring about good within our community and amongst people we meet every day. God spoke to a teenage boy, Jeremiah, whose story is told in the bible and he says to him "Before I formed you in your mother's womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart". Jeremiah was an ordinary lad, and he said to God, "But God, look at me, I don't know anything, I'm only a boy". And then God said to him, "Don't say, 'I'm only a boy. I'll tell you where to go and you'll go there. I'll tell you what to say and you'll say it. Don't be afraid, I'll be right there, looking after you." And God was true to his word. Jeremiah spoke about things that were happening amongst his people, things about what was to happen in the future. And because God was guiding him every step of the way, everything that Jeremiah said about the future came true.

And that's the amazing thing - that as God looks upon people, even boys as young as you, he says the same thing - he's chosen you for a special purpose; he's known that before you were even born, and he will be with you every step of the way, and give you all the wisdom and strength that you will need as you serve him.

In fact throughout the Bible, God has used ordinary people - boys and girls - for amazing tasks. Let me give you some examples :

You will know about Joseph, who was the son of Jacob, even though he had very jealous brothers, and they left him for dead in a pit, and then sold him into slavery, he was chosen by God to save God's people from famine.

God chose a Hebrew boy called Moses, literally as he was still a baby, to now belong to an Egyptian family, and eventually become a spokesman for God (even with a stutter) to lead all of God's people out of slavery and begin their journey towards freedom.

God chose a young boy, a shepherd called David, to help defeat an army that were making vast amounts of ground on the Israelite army. And then grow up to be the Israel's king and actually be part of the bloodline resulting in the birth of Jesus.

All of these people, and many more like them were just ordinary boys like all of you, and yet God called them for a greater purpose in order to fulfil his plan for the world.

Our reading today from 1 Samuel 3 tells an amazing story of another ordinary boy, called by God. His name was Samuel.

You see in order to understand how special Samuel was, we need to go back a little bit in the story. There was a woman called Hannah, and Hannah couldn't have any children which made her very upset. She prayed to God in desperation, praying "God, if you give me a baby boy, I will make sure that he serves in your temple all of his life. Well there was a kind priest nearby who overheard Hannah's prayer. And when she told him everything, he prayed that she would receive from God all that she wished for. And that's what happened. Hannah gave birth to a boy. So she named him Samuel. She committed Samuel to God. So she took him to the temple to be cared for by Eli the priest. And so our story today tells how as Samuel was asleep one night, he heard someone call out his name. So Samuel thought it was Eli, so he ran into him. But Eli said it wasn't him, and sent him back to sleep. Anyway, this happened a few times until Eli, recognising that it was God calling, told him that the next time he heard the voice Samuel should reply "Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening". And that's what he did, and so God then began to guide Samuel in the plans and purposes that he had for his life.

Samuel would eventually anoint David as the new King over Israel, paving the way for the bloodline eventually through to Jesus.

Isn't that amazing, that God had chosen Samuel, even when he was a little boy and an ordinary little boy at that, and that through the wisdom that God would give him, he would ensure the royal line to King Jesus would be maintained.

And we could keep on going through ordinary boys, and also girls, in the bible whom God has chosen for special roles.

So what can each of us learn today from this.

Well first, know that God has a plan to use you if you are willing to listen to him. Remember that Samuel needed to respond to God's call during the night. When he heard the voice, he responded with "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening". God is in the business of calling every one of us to follow him, but many people choose to not hear him. Some get too distracted

by other things in life - their jobs, their sports, their families. Remember that Hannah was willing to even hand over Samuel to God's work as soon as he was old enough. That would have meant losing out financially by keeping him in the family. Instead they heard the call from God and obeyed. Even at your early age, know that God has a plan for your life, and all you need to do is listen and he will direct you. When Ian and I knew we were being called by God to serve him in BB and for me as a minister, we were willing to take that step

Secondly, don't ever think that God cannot use you. He is willing to use every one of us for his purposes, and he has a specific plan for your life - just trust that he will give you all you need to fulfill it. There's a great verse in the bible that says, "I can do all things through Christ who gives me the strength" (Philippians 4:13). Remember that it was God who equipped the ordinary people in the bible to do extraordinary things. Remember that God was able to take Moses with his stutter and give him the ability to speak on behalf of all the people. Remember that God was able to use David, with some smooth stones and a sling to defeat a powerful giant. Remember that God was able to shut the mouth of the lions in the den to protect Daniel overnight. Remember that God will equip you with whatever you

need. Don't ever try to do things in your own strength. Trust in God to do the work through you.

And finally, God brings us all together for his purposes. He doesn't send us out on our own. When some of you go and do Duke of Edinburgh expeditions through BB, you will soon realise that it's not about you getting over the line that matters, it's getting the whole team over that is important, so you work together. Similarly, God has given us his Church, the people, to work together with one aim in mind. Samuel could not have done much if he hadn't Eli to guide him. Moses couldn't have done much if he hadn't Aaron to walk with him. David could not have completed the things he had to do without friends like Jonathan or others like Nathan guiding him. We all need each other. And through our collective purpose, we can do amazing things in God's plans.

So as you think about the life you have ahead of you, know that God has incredible things in store for you if you seek him throughout your life. You never know you may be a future BB Captain or even Minister of this Church or even like some of the famous people earlier, you may even be the prime minister. What matters is that whatever you do, it's in God's plans that matter.

However a bit like the X-Men, people may think it strange that you follow how God directs you rather than the world around you. It may in fact lead to people making fun of you. And yet, who would you rather serve? God or someone else? There is so much ability within this room right now to make a positive impact into our town. So what should you do next? Simply speak every day to God and ask him to show you in your life, his special plans he has for you. And then finally, like Samuel, follow God's plans. There is no better place than to be where God wants you.