One of the distinctive features of God as we have come to know him through the various stories in the Bible is that he is God of people, a God who calls and invites us to join with him in the carrying out of his desires and plans for human well-being.

The story of Israel begins with the calling of Abraham and Sarah. In spite of their advanced age, God declares that they will be the ancestors of a great people, that they will one day possess the land of Canaan, and that they and their offspring will be a blessing for all peoples.

The call of Moses led to the liberation of the Israelites from oppression in Egypt, the sealing of a covenant between them and God at Sinai, and the giving on the mountain of the commandments and laws that have marked the life of countless Jews and Christians over the centuries.

All the great prophets of Israel underwent experiences which convinced them that they were being called by God to speak in his name. Sometimes it was to warn the people that their idolatry, injustice and political machinations, if kept up, would lead to disaster; at other times it was to encourage them and to give them hope in the face of suffering and defeat.

Today’ first reading describes the call of Isaiah. He is in the temple in Jerusalem where he has a vision of God sitting on a throne accompanied by fiery creatures called Seraphs. They proclaim the holiness of God, his utter transcendence to all that exists. Isaiah’s initial reaction to the vision is one of fear and of unworthiness. “Woe is me,” he says, “I am lost. I am a man of unclean lips and I live among a people of unclean lips.”

When one of the Seraphs touches Isaiah’s lips with a live coal, his sense of himself is transformed to the point that when God asks, “Whom shall I send,” he answers without hesitation, “Here am I, send me.”

Although all the great prophets experienced analogous calls, each call was different from the others depending on the personality of the one called, his gifts and abilities, even his social standing.

A central feature of the public life of Jesus is his calling of people to be his disciples. He invited them to join with him in his itinerant ministry in order to learn from him and eventually to continue his mission.

Today’s gospel contains Luke’s account of the call of four of Jesus’ first disciples, Peter and Andrew, James and John. They are all fishermen, a type of work which, paradoxically, has prepared them to be fishers of a different kind.

The considerable and unexpected catch of fish that Peter and his partners have made in response to Jesus’s suggestion of lowering their nets one more time strikes him as miraculous. He recognizes in Jesus a power beyond the ordinary. Like Isaiah in his vision of the Holy One, Peter feels himself unworthy of even being in the presence of Jesus, let alone joining with him in his work. “Go away from me Lord,” he says, “for I am a sinful man.” To this, Jesus responds, “Do not be afraid, from now on you will catch people.”

The experience of Peter is to some degree the experience of every Christian. We are all called by God to a life in keeping with our destiny as creatures made in God’s image and likeness, as people called to be in relationship with God and with one another, called to be disciples and friends of Jesus.

At different moments in the course of our lives we can suddenly becme ware of being called. . The first and most fundamental call is to life itself. We are called to live our lives to the full and in doing so to contribute to the well-being of the world and of one another.

The call to life takes on an added dimension when it is complemented by a call to faith, faith in God and in Jesus and in what his life and destiny have revealed to us about God and God’s relationship to us and ours to him.

With baptism comes the call to share in the life of Jesus and in the life of the church. Some are called to ordained ministry and others to various forms of lay ministry. All are called to be actively involved in the struggle of the church to fulfill its complex and many-sided mission in our world.

There is no reason why we should not recognize and respond to God’s call at work in almost every area of human life, in being a parent, a teacher or a nurse, in caring for the elderly and the chronically ill, in working in science and technology, in business and care for the climate, in other work that in any way serves the common good.

We discern God’s calls, whether in the religious or the secular sphere, by our talents and aptitudes, our desires and affinities. A religious person tries to discern how one’s choices and decisions are or are not inline with what we have come to know about ourselves, the world, and God’s mysterious design for us as individuals and as members of our family, the church and the broader world.