

Sunday 24th January 2021

Opening Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, help us today to hear again your call to discipleship, and faithfully to follow wherever you would lead. May the good news of your living, dying and rising among us resonate afresh deep within, stirring us to sincere repentance, deeper faith and renewed service. Teach us now to live more authentically as your people, in the light of your kingdom.

Come, Living Lord, and be close as we worship. May we take to heart the words we hear, mean with all our hearts the words we say, and pray with all our hearts for those in need. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Hymn: Will you come and follow me (CCL license: 256444)
words by John Bell and Graham Maule

(You can find the tune by clicking [here](#) and perhaps join us)

Will you come and follow me, if I but call your name?
Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?
Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known,
Will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?

Will you leave your self behind if I but call your name?
Will you care for cruel and kind and never be the same?
Will you risk the hostile stare should your life attract or scare,
Will you let me answer prayer in you and you in me?

Will you love the 'you' you hide if I but call your name?
Will you quell the fear inside and never be the same?
Will you use the faith you've found to reshape the world around
Through my sight and touch and sound in you and you in me?

Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.
Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.
In your company I'll go where your love and footsteps show.
Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

Reading: Mark 1.14-20

Reflection

Many years ago, it was told to me that anyone who works in sales will have heard of the 'elevator pitch': a good salesperson should be able to sell their product in the brief span of a lift journey. The best pitches describe the difference a product will make to you, not just what it does. Today's reading from Mark's gospel has Jesus' ministry wrapped up in a nutshell. If we had bumped into him in a lift he would have said: 'The kingdom of God is at hand, repent and believe the good news.' Would we have been tempted to respond to such simplicity?

That message offers the possibility of change and as a consequence the hope of a better world. However, it only has real significance when spoken by someone with integrity, someone like Jesus.

Do the messages we send out offer similar possibilities of a hope that inspires the listeners to bring about change within themselves, and as a consequence the world we live in, for the better? Will that message only have the potential to inspire when spoken with integrity by people whose lives mirror the message they speak?

Change is always problematic, as evidenced in 2020 as the pandemic struck - but does it terrify or inspire us - possibly both in equal measure. One thing for sure Jesus doesn't preach the gospel of permanence or expect us to remain stationary. The second verse of the hymn 'Onward Christian soldiers' may be parodied as 'Like a mighty tortoise, moves the church of God; brothers we are treading where we've always trod', but the parody works because we know that Jesus' call is for change. We often hear people say that they don't believe in 'change for change's sake', yet simply to be alive is to change and evolve; we all change as we grow older. The seasons bring change, and our faith life needs to reflect that. Often change comes when we are least expecting it, as was the case in the Spring of last year, and we embraced the challenge and opportunity both as a church and as individuals, all playing their part, however seemingly small, in helping others through the pandemic. As we continue to do so, we will be called to reflect on the changes we have made already and consider which of the new initiatives we should carry forward into the future, continuing to reach out to all in need, in many diverse ways.

For the four disciples who responded, the day would have seemed very ordinary until Jesus arrived. I don't think they were chatting about going out and finding a new religion; or even, a career change. And of course, there were others who didn't respond. I wonder if Jesus attracted those fishermen who were already disaffected?

The call 'to follow' as a Christian is a call to community. Jesus needs his disciples in 2021 to proclaim his message as widely as possible, and if that call to be Christian automatically and necessarily involves a call for change, permanent change, then we all need the support of others around us to enable us to grow. As Christians together, we create 'church' so we can offer support and accountability to one another.

Let us reflect as we hear Judith Nicholls poem on what Peter may have felt when Jesus called him.

Life was not easy. On some days fish leapt in profusion to our nets, sun-silvered in the early light; at other times storm-winds riled angry waves to battle and we longed for land, or nets were hauled in almost empty to the waiting shore. It was not always easy... but familiar, known, secure. That morning, as we cast our nets, there was no force, no need to follow; yet we followed, without question, sure. It was not just the steady gaze through sun-deep eyes reflecting rising hills and sea; not just the voice that filled the waiting air with calm and certainty; nor just the stance, the look that spoke of other worlds beyond the shore of Galilee and yet.... We followed, drawn invisibly, forever changed, both prisoner, yet free.

Prayer

God of the good news, we pray for all those in the waters of anxiety; we pray for all those caught up in nets of violence and oppression; we pray for all those sinking under the weight of pain and grief; we pray for all those whose nets and livelihoods are torn and ruined. We pray for all whose nets and hearts need mending and healing. For all these and those known to us individually, bring them safely to shore. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Blessing

Loving God, help us to use your time wisely. Leave behind those things that weigh us down. Face each new day courageously and cheerfully. And be blessed in all you do and say. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Margaret