

Reflection on Mark 1:14-20

Jesus calls the first disciples

by Kathy Morrison – for Sunday 24th January 2021

This is a very well-known passage, Jesus beginning his ministry, calling his first disciples. I wonder what part of this story speaks to you? Does any part of it disturb you? Challenge you about your own calling? Or does it fill you with hope and gratitude for the response of these first disciples?

Why **did** these four fishermen trust Jesus enough to leave family and livelihood and follow him into an unknown future?

Why did Jesus choose **them**? Did he know them already? Before Jesus called them, we're told by Mark: Jesus 'saw' the two brothers, Simon and Andrew ... and then 'saw' James and John, sons of Zebedee. 'Seeing' occurs many times in the gospels and often conveys a particular meaning - more than glancing at, looking at, but really *seeing* (e.g. Nathanael, in John 1:47-48), it's as if Jesus could see into their hearts and knew them through and through - just like he knows everything about **us** - and praise God, in spite of all our shortcomings, **still** loves us unconditionally!

As far as we know, all the twelve Jesus called were ordinary people, and Jesus didn't ask for qualifications, professional skills, or temple education. He wasn't looking for the wise and the wealthy; he picked ordinary people, probably much like us. And like us, we know his disciples were anything but perfect. On many occasions they misunderstood him. They often hesitated to follow him, nearly all ran away and hid when he was arrested; Judas betrayed him and Peter denied ever knowing him.

But these would be the people who, filled with the Holy Spirit, would continue Jesus' work on earth after his ascension — ordinary people, like you and me. They were called.

As Andy said last week, we often speak of "God's call" too narrowly, as if God "calls" people only into ordained ministry or positions in the church. But God calls every single one of us, yes, to follow Jesus, to repent and believe the Good News, to anchor our lives in God's love, goodness, forgiveness and mercy, AND to help others do the same. So many people need to hear the Good News of Jesus right now! God has a purpose, a calling for each of our lives, however humble it may seem to us. Something no one else can do in the way God intends for us to do it, although we may never understand the full significance of our role this side of eternity. I was surprised and encouraged by words from CS Lewis: *'The homemaker has the ultimate career. All other careers exist for one purpose only – and that is to support the ultimate career.'*

As the Methodist church we say our calling is to *respond* to the gospel of God's love in Christ and to *live out* its discipleship in worship and mission.

What does discipleship involve?

In the words of Rowan Williams (*Being Disciples*), a disciple is one who learns, a student, but not one who turns up once a week for a lecture – or a sermon! – it's a relationship, a commitment, that continues. Being a disciple entails being aware of and attentive to the teacher, staying close, 'abiding' as Jesus put it: abide in me and I will abide in you – and the disciple expects to be changed by this close relationship. A disciple watches expectantly that something extraordinary is about to burst through the ordinary and show the familiar landscape in a new light. As disciples we watch expectantly to see what God is doing in our neighbourhood, so

we can be where God is and join in God's work and be willing to keep the company of those that Jesus did; we listen for the Word to come alive for us in scripture, those occasional, startling light bulb moments that reveal in a flash something previously hidden from our understanding.

Do we think that's all very well, that was then, this is now, we can't abandon everything and go like the first disciples did – not at my time of life, certainly not while we're in lockdown! And perhaps Jesus does only call a few people to such a drastically different life. I thank God for people like Heidi Baker who heard and answered the astonishing call of Jesus to go and work among the addicts and Triad gangs in what was the Forbidden City, and transformed lives in Jesus' name. God certainly equips those who are called.

Not for us, we say. But have we become too settled on our faith journey? Calling is word that suggests there is always something ahead, God always has more for us, and wants to draw us on, to a new level of understanding, a fuller life, whatever stage of maturity we've reached -in years or faith. Are we still *expecting* to grow in the life of the Spirit? or have we done all our spiritual growing and reached a point where we want to rest and not feel challenged anymore? Are we still willing to move onwards, leaving the equivalent of our nets behind, eager to discover - or re-kindle the **joy** that comes from following Jesus?

What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus during lockdown?

During these troubling, uncertain times although we may feel lonely, frightened, weary, we *know* we are not going through this alone, that God is with us and can give us peace whatever we are facing, and however wretched we are feeling.

Not everything is locked down.

Prayer isn't locked down – in the company of over 2 billion Christians around the world, 'the voice of prayer is never silent, nor dies the strain of praise away'. And persisting in prayer is *the* most transformational force in the lives of individuals, churches and nations. (*Pete Greig, Dirty Glory*)

Our minds, our imagination are not locked down, perhaps this **is** just such a time, an opportunity for us to see visions, dream dreams – of what we can do to work towards a future of peace and justice and equality for all, as God's kingdom becomes established throughout the world; how *all* life on earth would flourish, if we lived in harmony with creation.

Compassion is not locked down, neither are thankfulness, encouragement, kindness, generosity and blessing.

As we allow Christ to shine through our lives, so we are enabled to **be** the signs of light and life, of hope and joy that are so needed in the world today.

Yes, we **are** going through very dark times, but did you hear the inspiring words of Amanda Gorman, the 22-year-old National Youth Poet Laureate at President Joe Biden's inauguration: 'there is always light, if only we can see it; there is light if only we're brave enough to **be** it'.

May *Christ* be *our* light. Amen