



Sermon: - 21st January 2018

Come and follow ...

Psalm 62: 5-12; Mark 1: 14-20

I know that they say that time passes more quickly when you are older but sometimes it seems to pass ridiculously quickly. Just a couple of weeks ago we celebrated the birth of Jesus and now suddenly we are reading about his Ministry as a 30-year-old man. We have just recently accompanied shepherds and wise men as they sought out the saviour, the king who would establish the rule of God on the earth. We visited him in the stable and celebrated and marvelled at God's coming among us as a baby. But the importance of celebrating his birth is about more than just wondering about the miracle of God becoming human. The birth narratives have signs for us about the nature of Jesus' ministry here on earth. Even in the midst of the angels' song and the joy of Christmas there are hints that all is not well.

In the visit of the wise men in particular, we are given clues that while Jesus' birth signals peace between God and humanity, his ministry is going to stir up enmity between humanity and God. In the gifts of Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh, as well as the response of Herod to the news of the birth of this new king, and his reaction in slaughtering all male children under two years of age, we get a clear picture that this kingdom, when it comes, has the potential to cause huge divisions, hatred between different factions, and ultimately, the death of Jesus himself.

But that is still to come, today we have reached the point in Jesus' life here on earth when he begins to teach us about the kingdom, to establish a movement which aims to usher in an age of the rule of God. In our gospel reading this morning Jesus lays out his manifesto "The time has come," he says. "The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!" the next three years, he will explain and demonstrate this statement. The disciples he calls this morning are only the first of many he will call, people of all different ages, stages, and statuses; all different personalities, skills and talents, all of whom will display different attitudes to faith and capacity for faith. Some of whom will leave their old lives behind to follow, others who will follow right where they are. Jesus turns none of them away. Although, as we heard in our reflective readings a moment ago, some of them turn away of their own accord.

So, what does he call them to? What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus? Let me ask you a question, what is a disciple? ... Now I have another question, do you think that you are disciples? Just think about that for a moment or two. What is a disciple, and are we disciples?

Obviously, I don't know what answers you came up with but by my understanding of the word disciple, you are all disciples because you are here in church this morning. A disciple is a pupil, a follower, and when you come to church presumably part of why you come is to worship God, to learn about God, to learn about the Christian life, perhaps to think about how to be a better Christian. That makes you a disciple. So, if all of us here this morning are disciples, what does it mean for us as individuals to follow Jesus?

The first thing to notice about the call of the disciples is that those who answer the call of Christ often have to leave something behind. Andrew and Simon leave their nets; James and John leave their father. The rich young man was asked to leave his wealth. For me, following the call of Jesus brought me into Ministry which meant that I didn't pursue a different career. I always dreamt of being an artist. But leaving something behind doesn't necessarily mean losing out. The disciples found meaning and purpose in following Jesus. I would say that I have found meaning and purpose in following my call. We may have to leave something behind, but I do believe that what Jesus will replace it with will be something much better. Ultimately, I think the message of following Jesus is about moving forward. Not hanging on to the past. But sometimes the only way to receive something good is to give up whatever it is that we are currently holding on to. Do we ever find ourselves stuck in places we don't want to be, simply because we are unwilling to change?

Monkeys are fast and agile creatures –almost impossible to catch. In Africa, monkey hunters observed the monkeys' behaviour and designed traps specifically to catch monkeys. The hunters would put food like banana and peanuts in containers with an opening slightly bigger than a monkey's hand. When a monkey saw one of the containers, it would put its hand inside to grab the food. When it tried to withdraw its hand, clutching the food, it would realise that it's hand was stuck. No matter how hard it tried, it couldn't extract its hand from the jar. The opening of the jar is simply not large enough for the fist to get out as long as the monkey is holding the food. The only way the monkey can get free is to let go of the food. Although the monkey could escape, it won't let go and holds the food ever more tightly. All the hunters had to do was throw a net over the monkey, he was trapped.

To move forward with Jesus, fishermen had to let go of their nets. Matthew had to let go of his career. The rich young man couldn't let go of his money. And I guess this is what it means when Jesus asks us to repent. We have come to think of repentance as being asking forgiveness for sin; the word repent is almost synonymous with the word sorry. But that's not really what it is. It's much more about letting go of what is holding you back and moving forward with Jesus. And there is a sense in which this is a call to us every single day. Every day we are asked if we are prepared to leave behind the things that prevent us following. Every day we are asked to empty our hands, so that Jesus might fill our hearts.

And of course, we fail, we hang onto things from our past, and even from our present, that prevent us walking into the future. But here's the thing, when we think about Simon the fisherman who left his net to follow Jesus, and think about his transformation into Peter, we know that he was constantly hanging on to the wrong things, constantly failing to live up to his good intentions in that initial decision, right up until the moment of Jesus death. But we also that Jesus never gave up on him. And Jesus never gives up on us, so we do get fresh start every day, and a new chance to let go of all the things that prevent us following. But I think there is more to this than just personal discipleship. This concept of discipleship and following and repenting is presented to us, more often than not, as being about each of us as individuals. But I think it also applies to us as a congregation, a fellowship, the body of Christ here in Campsie. What are we hanging on to as congregation that is preventing us moving forward with Jesus as a church? What do we need to let go of that will enable us to be more faithful? What do we need to let go of that will enable us to show more clearly that we are disciples? What do we need to let go of that will leave more room for Jesus to be revealed in our midst?

The psalmist tells us that God will reward us according to what we have done. Perhaps all we need to do is to let go of the past, of how things used to be, of how we wish they were still, and in doing that perhaps we can see more clearly how they can be in the future. Jesus calls us, each of us, here this morning, to let go of the past, to walk into the future with him and see what he will make of it if we let him.