

Epiphany 3, 22 January 2023, Year A, Matthew

Isaiah 9.1-4; Ps 27.1, 4-12; 1 Corinthians 1.10-18; Matthew 4.12-23

Today as we remember the calling of Andrew and Peter and James and John, the latter known as sons of Zebedee – called by Jesus to follow him – it is a paramount obligation that we as Christians also recall that moment or those moments in our lives when God in Christ called us to follow.

Today's Gospel calls us to consider what we left to follow Jesus 'for his dear sake' as we sang last Sunday. We may think of the material luxuries we relinquished, or a way of life, or a convention of believing, or an addiction, or a set of friends to name a few. Maybe we left none of them at the time of our calling and our lives continued on the same trajectory, now with a dusting of Christianity. This may give us pause for thought...

It is clear from today's gospel that with the call to follow there comes a definite break. These four fishermen responding to the call to follow left a way of life. The ordered life of fishermen by the Sea of Tiberius, better known to us as the Sea of Galilee. They left a family, a home, a town, a region that of Zebulun and Naphtali.

Further we note the calling to follow does not occur behind closed doors in some space we have retreated to, but in the midst of life. To be specific – while both sets of brothers are at work. The unanimity of the brothers here is striking as we hear about Prince Harry's grievances concerning his brother. Andrew and Peter are called while casting a net into the lake. James and John, the sons of Zebedee are called while they are mending nets. Jesus meets these four out in the open, while they are at work and calls them to follow and that is what they do. They follow.

Is there a further clue hidden in today's gospel? Note Andrew and Peter cast their nets from the shore, possibly because they could not afford a boat, whereas James and John mend their nets with their father next to their own boat. The call to follow is not dependent on economic wealth or social status, but in what Jesus sees: four persons and their readiness to follow.

Let us also note that Matthew, the author of the Gospel, gives us one more bit of information. He tells us in the case of James and John that they also left their father. What was his reaction? Was it one of being pleased for his sons that they heard the call and followed? Was it one of sadness, because he was losing four hands to help him with the work of being a fisherman? What was the loss to him economically? And as a father what was the loss to him emotionally?

Finally, we are accustomed to most of the action of the Bible being centred in and around Jerusalem with the interlude of the two kingdoms after Solomon. The Ark of the Covenant being in Jerusalem since the time of David and Jerusalem being the place where the Temple was built under Solomon. The threat to the perceived order of things does not emanate from the centre, but from the margins: from Nazareth, from Galilee, from the carpenter's son leaving some to ask where does he get his wisdom from. In time scribes and Pharisees will seek him out in Galilee and quiz him, as his impact on the people becomes known, as his fame spreads.

One commentator looking at this scene pointedly states that Jesus causes confusion. Jesus more than unsettles things. Things will never be the same for Andrew and Peter, for James and John, for the Jewish people and for the Judeans. Life will never be the same for their families. The fishermen known by their occupation follow, but where will it take them? The future is an unknown

country that we step into every waking day. What will be the joys and assurances and challenges and the sorrows of this day, of the coming week, of this year – what will they be for us? A Turkish playwright, Mehmet Murat İldan speaks of the unknown country against the backdrop of the ever decreasing freedom to travel, ‘The future is an unknown country which requires hard to obtain visas for anyone to enter. Not all of us will get the chance to visit it.’ In contrast the call to follow that Jesus makes has a touch of lightness to it, but it is hard for us to leave the old self behind for what God promises to be a fuller life, a richer life, a more joyful life. We have too much to lose. We would rather trust our own instincts than a call to follow.

The calling of Andrew and Peter and James and John is framed by John the Baptist’s arrest and another prophecy from the Book of the Prophet Isaiah. During Advent, the Christmas season and now in the season of Epiphany Jesus’ appearing is backed by numerous prophecies, especially from the Psalms and Isaiah. It is evident that the Apostolic Church, the church of the apostles, the church of Andrew and Peter, and of James and John believed that Jesus was the fulfilment of what God had promised long ago preserved in the Hebrew scriptures. It is a ministry that begins with a call to repentance. The fulfilment of prophecy is a golden thread that gives coherence to the yoking of what we call the Old and the New Testaments. The calling is furthermore framed by a succinct summary of the effectiveness of Jesus’ public ministry prior to his final days in Jerusalem. Three things are highlighted and remain characteristic of the church’s ministry: Jesus’ teaching and healing ministries and his proclamation of the good news of the kingdom. The proclamation of the kingdom is good news indeed. In our time it is evident that what we proclaim as good news is not received or understood as good news by many, as it will have been the case in Jesus’ day. Call to mind how Herod the Great sees the baby born as a threat to his claim on the throne.

And today who wants to admit to themselves that they have bet on the wrong horse, that the life they live is a phantom of their own making, especially in a culture that says be whatever you want to be or just be yourself. Please no!

Finally, Jesus tells us in a few words why he calls Andrew and Peter and James and John. And why he calls us today. He calls people to make them fishers of men or in current English, 'I will make you fish for people'. They are to win people for God. They will do so by upholding Jesus' ministry of teaching and healing and proclaiming that the Good News of the kingdom had begun. It is my conviction that we here at Christ Church must continue to find ways of communicating the Good News of the Kingdom. We are to be fishers of men.

Here and now I recall earlier initiatives such as Theology on Tap, where we went first to a Gaststätte (restaurant) in the Resselpark next to the UBahn station Karlsplatz and later to the Museums Café, but also our initiative at the United Nations under the heading of **UN**complicated. In both these welcome initiatives we sought to meet people beyond the walls of the church in a more neutral setting for a mutually enriching dialogue (Austausch). The concerts led by members of Christ Church held in the church in the last few years coupled with a short message have embodied a gentle outreach aspect to them, like our involvement in the Lange Nacht der Kirchen (Open night of the churches, literally long night). The bazaar and the street party have gentle outreach aspects embedded in them, as we show what we can accomplish together as a Christian community for the benefit of the wider community. The church shop is another way in which we make known our presence within the community, while serving and benefitting the wider community, particularly our neighbourhood in the third district, as well as our continued involvement in the soup kitchen with a difference, s' Häferl, while we continue to hope to revive our prison ministry, closed since 2019 due to staff

shortages at the prison and the pandemic. All the above is welcome, but it must always serve a purpose, a purpose that belongs to us as Christians that we are to be fishers of people in the Lord's name and in his service.

CityKirche is a German-speaking Anglican initiative in Vienna led by Christian Hofreiter, whose prime purpose is to reach out and to be available to those who do not know the Lord Jesus. Every Christian community always exists to make known the loving kindness of God to those who remain inhibited, sceptical or unbelieving. It belongs to our DNA. It is a part and parcel our life-blood. It is a sign of a congregation's vitality. Christian communities never exist just for themselves. They are not to close themselves off from the world, but to be seen to be going to the world. They too must too often repent and turn anew to the world sometimes in new ways, but more often in time tested ways. Another telling way – and one we have been discussing in council as the pandemic hopefully ebbs in which we witness to a sceptical and seemingly evermore hostile world – is our coming together week by week for worship and fellowship come what may: inclement weather, busy lives, reluctant partners and spouses, children, distance, age, ailments, financial worries, exams, studies, deadlines, after a long night at the office or more likely a party...

The tradition of the church has the twelve disciples spreading the message of the good news of the Kingdom across the world that work continues today. May you and we learn what it means to be fishers of men, this spreading of the gospel, for ourselves and for our journey with Christ as we embark with Andrew and Peter and James and John for the next adventure of a faith filled and lived life as we follow. **Amen.**