

Sunday Sermon - 24.01.21
Delivered by Rev'd Stephen Monsieigneur
3rd Sunday after Epiphany

Gospel of Mark 1.14-20

14 After John was put in prison, Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God. 15 'The time has come,' he said. 'The kingdom of God has come near. Repent and believe the good news!' 16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' 18 At once they left their nets and followed him. 19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him.

Our readings last week spoke of recognising the voice of God when God, when Jesus spoke to us. Today we must consider our response to the call of God through Jesus in our lives.

Imagine --- The man Jesus walks into your life and says 'stop whatever you are doing and come work with me.' On offer is a job for which you feel inadequate, a job with suspect if any clearly defined working conditions. O yes! There may be travelling, living hand to mouth, ridicule should you take up the invitation.

Imagine --- The man Jesus standing in front of you, looking straight at you saying, 'stop whatever you are doing, come work with me.'

How would you answer? How to date, have you answered? Would you say yes or no or would you hesitate asking for time to make arrangements first, to protect your nest egg.

In reality I suspect that many --- including myself --- while so much wanting to believe we would immediately say yes first, would in reality, go for the protection of security first.

Our lives are not as simple as binary numbers, one and zero. They are filled with fractions, the bits and pieces that make up the kaleidoscope that is the many facets of not only our lives but who we are as we are known to ourselves and to God.

Most if not all of us live busy lives which often distract us from time to sit with God, to listen for God's voice, to pray and purposefully share ourselves with God. In our business We become so focused on the priorities of this world.

Now, we cannot deny the reality of our human existence. To survive we must attend to various needs nutrition, shelter, payment of accounts, and other commitments. We are a creature that thrives in family or social units which requires us to balance our individual and communal wants and needs with those of others.

This means that we have a responsibility to others as they do to us. That is community. Achieving this does require focus.

God however is not calling us to neglect our responsibility to others or to our own wellbeing, but we are called to prioritise. We are called to put our relationship with God above all else. We are called to integrate. Everything in our lives, all that we do should ultimately be for the purpose of growing in stronger relationship with God. For it is through truly knowing God that our fulfilment is achieved.

Consider the words of the psalmist (Vv 6-8a);

6 He [God] only is my rock and my salvation:
my strong tower, so that I shall not be moved.

7 In God is my deliverance and my glory:
God is my strong rock and my shelter.

8 Trust in him at all times, O my people:

This fulfilment of is not just the promise from God through which our hope of eternal salvation is reached, but the finding of meaning or purpose in this life. Jesus is the example of the scaffold upon which our human lives must be built. We must like Jesus consider everything, each decision in the context of how it impacts not only our life our relationship with others, but importantly on our relationship with God.

In being called to repent we are being called away from sin. From all which separates us from God. Prioritising things without such attention to God and our relationship is to dance with temptation, the devil, and speaking for myself this is a dance where I am prone to miss-step and fall over.

The coming of the kingdom of God forces us to react. We are being called to repent, to refocus our lives on knowing God, on living for God.

In our collect today we learn that God has sent Jesus as a mouth piece calling us to repent of our sin. Jonah in the first reading is also sent with a message to tell the Ninevites that unless they repent, in forty days Nineveh will be overthrown.

But what is it that the Ninevites or even ourselves are called to repent from?

What is the sin that we commit?

The answer is found in the reality of how we would, how we respond to Gods call, Do we say yes, no or in a moment.

Jesus offers us a better response, a salvation. "Repent" and "Believe."

Repentance and belief are inseparable. We repent because we have sinned and need a Savior. We believe because God is faithful and true. When we repent, we abandon a stronghold in which we trusted. When we believe, we place that trust in a new place, on the Rock who saves us. Repentance sees the coming judgment; belief fastens onto the good news. Repentance is retrospective; while belief looks to the future. Repentance and belief are the foundation of faith.

God is not trying to make life hard. Quite the opposite. As I just mentioned Jesus is the example of how we should live. Jesus was not immune to the realities of human existence, he was not immune to temptation, but he always put before his own desire the relationship between himself and God.

Our human lives in the grand scheme of creation are immeasurably limited, but they are just as immeasurably significant to God. This is evident in Paul's words to the Corinthians. Paul is addressing the reality of human desire and need against the restriction of time we have in this life to respond to God through the invitation offered by Jesus.

We are all being continually called by God. This may be through our own internal thoughts or voices or through the words of others or opportunities that appear to simply present themselves to us. And, just as it was for Simon and his brother Andrew, and for so-so many more over the centuries who have responded with yes, Lord, the commitment if we say yes will also likely have a cost, a sacrifice.

Wear not simply being called to be good, to attend worship, No, we are being called for far more important work. We are being called to make God through the lessons and examples of Jesus be known to others, to the whole world. We are being called to answer YES and to make our lives the example for others. We are not called to be arrogant in our rightness but to be humble in our weakness knowing that even like this God deems us worthy of love.

Jesus answered God's call and for us paid freely with his life. In doing so, Jesus opened for us a new covenant and opportunity to again know God. How will you answer when you hear him call, 'Come, follow me,' [sic] 'and I will send you out to fish for people.' (v17)

Amen.