

#### Matthew 4.12-23

Now when Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he withdrew to Galilee. He left Nazareth and made his home in Capernaum by the sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali, so that what had been spoken through the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled: "Land of Zebulun, land of Naphtali, on the road by the sea, across the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who sat in the region and shadow of death light has dawned." From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near." As he walked by the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea—for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went from there, he saw two other brothers, James son of Zebedee and his brother John, in the boat with their father Zebedee, mending their nets, and he called them. Immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him. Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people.

Have you ever met someone who had a really magnetic personality? Perhaps you didn't even know why, but you were immediately drawn to them, and wanted to be around them. Or maybe you've experienced making a new friend, where you meet, and instantly just click? Or perhaps you have a hero - someone you really admire, and would do anything for.

Well, I think something similar must be going on here in our gospel reading. Jesus comes across these fishermen, who he hasn't met before. They are busy doing their jobs. They are probably a bit damp and

grubby, they are used to working really hard all day every day to earn a living for themselves and their families. Jesus walks by and sees them, and says 'follow me'. And there is just something about Jesus that is completely magnetic. It was a moment when something simply 'clicked'. These men immediately dropped everything, their nets, their jobs, their families, their responsibilities, their day to day routines, and from that moment on they followed this man Jesus.

Can we even imagine what that would be like? Is there anyone you have ever known who you would literally drop everything for, at a moment's notice?

I have a theory as to why the disciples were drawn in so instantly. I think it was because everyday life is full of lots and lots of little things to worry about, but when they saw Jesus they knew that he was offering something bigger. He was about something that was more important, that was deeper, that answered something of the very question of what life is all about in the first place. The disciples saw something that they knew they needed. So it was worth dropping everything else they had in their whole lives.

And for ourselves, this is worth reflecting on. We live in a very different world, but we are people juggling all the difficulties of life, just like the disciples were.

Everywhere we look we see politics and arguments, we know people who are self-centered at the expense of others, our government and other leaders often let us down, we see people losing the ability to live in harmony with others, many people have forgotten the art of how to disagree well, or how to respect and love those who are different to themselves. The world often seems very broken, busy and confusing. And certainly for me, and I'm sure sometimes for you, it's all a bit much, and it's hard to see who we should listen to or trust.

But, that's not the end of the story. If you look at our gospel reading, it contains a quote from the prophet Isaiah, which says 'the people who sat in darkness have seen a great light'. Because all that stuff, all that worry and brokenness, anxiety and confusion, is not all that there is. When the disciples saw Jesus for the first time, and immediately dropped everything in order to follow him, they did it because they could sense that Jesus was the light. Jesus offers a bigger picture, that is more important than everything else we worry about.

And it's not that Jesus makes all the bad stuff stop or go away, but the light he brings is that he promises to always be with us through everything. The light is that no matter what happens, we know we are absolutely loved, just for being ourselves, and that we are not alone. The light is that in the business of life, we know what really matters - to follow Jesus - to love God and love our neighbour.

And love is something you might hear a lot about in church. I certainly feel like I go on about it in most of my sermons! But that is because it is the most wondrous thing. To truly know you are loved is incredible. It gives a sense of security, of wholeness, of peace. To know that you don't have to tick boxes or improve yourself first, but that God just loves you to bits right here and right now - this is to see light in the darkness!

We can see this in Jesus calling these disciples to follow him. Jesus calls them just as they are, from where they are, being who they are. Jesus doesn't seem bothered by their low social status or lack of political power. He doesn't ask that they shower before joining him, nor does he ask questions about their education, their usefulness or their holiness. He just says, 'follow me'.

And this simple call, held out to everybody just as they are, is what we are about as the church. In our own discovery of the light of Jesus and what it is to be loved by God, we have the joy and the challenge of inspiring others to join us. And why invite people to join us? Because we have something to celebrate! We know the best thing there is to know! As these first disciples show us, Jesus is totally magnetic. He is more important than literally anything else, and well worth following.

So who can we call to join us in following? Anyone and everyone. We can invite those who we think might not be interested, because maybe they are just waiting to be asked! We can invite people who have different interests or skills or values in life, because at the bottom of their souls, they too are looking for light in the darkness. We can invite our next door neighbours, because perhaps they have always been curious about our faith. We can even invite the people who we have invited before, and they said no, because maybe something has changed for them, and maybe now, they might say yes.

This last week has been The week of Prayer for Christian Unity. And the reason that we can hope for

unity, despite all our differences and disagreements with other Christians who might see their faith a bit differently to ours, or who might worship in a different way, or who might hold various strong opinions that we disagree with - the reason we can pray for unity is because of Jesus' call.

The light in the darkness is far greater than our ideas of how to do services, or at what age we should baptise people, or who should be allowed to marry. The light of Jesus' call is bigger than that. It includes you, and me, and the person you disagree with, and it is held out to us as we all are, even in the midst of our brokenness and mess.

So our week of prayer for christian unity is no vain hope. It is an acknowledgement of a truth, that we all share in the one call of Jesus, and that the core of Christianity is this magnetic encounter with the one who is worth giving up everything else - for we are loved and called by him!

So we celebrate. We celebrate that we are part of a huge, diverse, frustrating but beautiful family who are held in God's arms. And God is just absolutely delighted to have us here.

Amen.