

## Bennochy church 18th November 2018

I think at some point in our lives, we have all received the unexpected call. Out of the blue, the phone rings, your mobile pings and the text appears, or there is that knock on the door, and in that instant, our world is turned upside down. Words failing to express how we feel. We are no longer in control of what is happening round about us. In the face of bad news, our emotions can shut down or they take over. Faced with demanding situations where a quick response is required, there are times when we just don't know what's the right thing to do. The mind goes blank.

I was trying to put myself in the shoes of the Peter, Andrew James and John. They are fishermen getting on with their work, on the shores of Lake Galilee, when they receive an unexpected call. It is not bad news, but it demands a response, *"Come with me, and I will teach you to catch men."*

From the way the passage is written, it implies that this encounter is the first time they have met. Jesus is the stranger who just happens to notice a couple of fishermen. It got me wondering if these men had at least heard some of the rumours about Jesus and what he was saying. This idea of the Kingdom of God. Mind you, that lofty theology for fishermen. Am I doing them a disservice? Or maybe they had heard about John the Baptist and what had happened to him. The ably gospel stories entwine the lives of these two men, born under similar

circumstances. Can we stretch the story even further, and say, did Jesus actually know them and this was not their first encounter. So maybe Jesus had an inkling of how they would respond? And from Mark's point of view, is the story conveniently written, to tie the work of the men, to the call of Jesus? Come and be, "Fishers of men"?

At the very least, their response to the call of Jesus, seems to be, to give up their livelihood. Is that the idea that Marks wants his readers to grasp. Down tools, give everything up and follow Jesus. Over the next three years did they ever fish again? Of course they did. Think of the story of the calming of the storm. They were out fishing again. This story is about the call of God and response of these men, and never mind the other details that might get in the way.

Is it a lot to ask? Come on guys, leave what you are doing. Let's go swim against the tide of society; challenge the religious authorities, the Roman empire and put ourselves in danger. Whose up for that? That is not what Jesus said, but is what happened as a result of responding to the call. I wonder how much they thought was expected of them? What did they actually understand of what Jesus said. We will never know. We only have a single phrase. *"I will teach you to catch men"*. Did they think, in stepping out their boats they would begin a revolution?

We can speculate, did Jesus explain it in more detail, before they responded, or did they just step out into the unknown. For whatever reason, putting their trust in this man, who they might have never met in the lives before. I think the dramatic nature of this event has been lost, in the way we follow Jesus today. *'Guys, good for you. Lead on. We're right behind you!'* Are we? That is the question. Have we replaced the power of revolution, with the safety and comfort of tradition. It is easier to stay in the boat.

As so often we find in the stories of scripture, the details are missing and we are challenged to fill in the blanks. I think to understand this event of 'call', we need to literally expand the story and realise that their response to the call of Jesus might, just might have happened over a period of time, and what we have here, is the 'moment' of response. There might be times in our lives where God does ask us to make that difficult and 'in the moment' response, but I believe God acts more, in our lives over time, even if we have been unaware of the events that have led us to make that decision. That choice to leave the safe surroundings of the boat.

The spirit of God is always working. In whispers, where the voice of God is almost silent, and, in those moments of shouting, where a response is required. This story is a 'shouting moment'. It is now time to decide what to do. We have heard the call. It is now time step out of the boat.

Remember, one of these men is Peter. He would not know at this time, that Jesus would call him again, to step out in faith, not onto the sandy beach, but out of the boat and into the midst of a storm, and to walk on the water.

Responding to the call of Jesus is not easy, at the best of times, but there will be moments when the unexpected call will come, in times of conflict, anxiety, despair or even pain. Those moments, when hope is low, and faith needs to be strong and the hand of Christ will stop us sinking below the waves.

God's call is always upon our lives. To step out of the boat and respond to the challenge, 'come fish with me' and together, we can build God's Kingdom of Justice, equality and shalom. Amen.