

Sermon for Epiphany 2, 17 Jan 2021, John 1:43-end, 1 Samuel 3:1-20

Lord God help us hear you calling us and have the courage to follow your son Jesus. Amen

I think there's something in this God and Jesus thing.....- thank goodness for that I hear you exclaim in surprise, she is just going to start preaching to us, surely she knows that!

You'll be relieved to know this is not a revelation of the past week, but dawned on me quite a number of years ago when I began to have niggling feelings about wanting to find out more about Jesus and feeling rather awkward that I didn't really know very much, even though I called myself a Christian and had been confirmed in my teens.

I think perhaps we don't often recognise God calling us to come closer to him or serve him in a particular way, even if we faithfully come to church, read our bibles and pray. Having a grounding in the Scriptures doesn't mean our eyes will be opened easily – we usually have to have someone else nudge us or show us possibilities and opportunities – and then we have to decide to act or not.

In our Old Testament reading Samuel didn't recognise God calling him, and even Eli was slow to let the penny drop. And Samuel is tested right from the start of his calling. When eventually the priest Eli realises it is God speaking to Samuel, rather than just some irritating crazy voice he is hearing, making Samuel come and disturb his sleep, Samuel gets a *horrible* message from God, saying that Eli's family will be punished because Eli's sons have sinned against God (they were sinning in a big way and Eli couldn't reform them). This must have been a bit of a shock for Samuel – the first words he hears from God are quite a challenge. Samuel had been dedicated to serve the Lord in the temple from a young age because his mother Hannah was so grateful to God for giving her a son, so Samuel must have developed knowledge of the Scriptures and had good and positive knowledge of God, although up to that point not a direct personal experience.

He then had to be courageous enough to tell the disturbing message to Eli – his boss, presumably the man who had more or less brought him up. It becomes a test of Samuel's calling : will Samuel tell Eli the hard truth, (he would be scared of upsetting Eli), or will he fudge the truth and opt for a safer route- perhaps a very human understandable start to a response to a call from God.

But Samuel takes the plunge after Eli has insisted on the truth- which actually made it easier for Samuel to follow God I think, because Samuel had to decide there and then, rather than worry about it for days: should he tell Eli, shouldn't he, what should he tell him? Sometimes that sort of thinking can really eat away at us- and often , if we trust God, speaking the truth, even though it's scary, can set us free and move the situation forward.

Actually I think God is persistent, God frequently calls us to look at our lives - Is he calling you to re-evaluate your life at the moment? - maybe COVID is making a lot of us do that- perhaps we should take this as an opportunity to really listen to Jesus , to come closer to him.

A new job, innovation, volunteering opportunity - a niggling feeling that you want to make a difference in the world but never plucked up courage to act - all these could be Jesus calling you to live out your faith, become a disciple or become a more active disciple - by encouraging others to find out more, regularly praying for people, places and events, engaging with the world around you by seeing it with God's eyes, through God's values and perspectives rather than the world's.

Being a disciple will make you stand out from the crowd which can be quite uncomfortable. Speaking about what you think God is saying to you or that you are following the promptings of the Holy Spirit can make people think you're a bit mad and roll their eyes and groan, or try and ridicule you.

Sometimes it's hardest to tell your family and friends that you want to follow Christ more closely – or that you are becoming a Christian- it takes a lot of courage as you're not sure of things to start with and you haven't got clever answers (do words ever really convince more than actions?) you just have a feeling of being drawn closer to God and to want to find out more.

That's why being part of a church – a Christian community - is so important and strengthening – yes we will have our own personal relationship with God through Jesus, but we can't follow him alone- and part of being a Christian is to bring others along too- just as the first disciples did- and we can do that more easily together, supporting each other.

Jesus is saying to us “Come and see! I want you to follow me – now – come and see what I can offer you – come and see and feel the sense of fulfilment, of fellowship, of joy and of peace that I can bring you if you truly let me in to your life and let me transform it from looking inward at self to outward to others.”

Jesus was obviously a very charismatic, persuasive character – the compassion, the caring, but also so perceptive – he picked one disciple Andrew who then told his brother Simon Peter to “come and see” Another, Philip , came to Jesus and believed – and went and told his friend Nathaniel. Jesus as a physical human couldn't go personally to everyone, so right from the beginning he picked people out that would go out and bring others in to follow him. And now the Church, the body of Christ- has spread throughout the world- Jesus is there for everyone , his disciples - Christians like you and me - can share his message and invite and encourage other people to follow him too.

Jesus is calling us to follow him, because he knows he can help us, because he loves us and because he can see we need him.

So try and carve a little more time with Jesus out of your day, even if you are living in a full, noisy house or flat where you have responsibilities of running a household or are working from home in a makeshift office in your bedroom for hours on end and getting more and more exhausted.

The clamour and stress and anxiety of COVID, the huge change in our lives from this time last year presses down on all of us, but Jesus will always be with us and he can help ease the burden. Jesus is saying come and follow me, I can bring you rest, I can bring you hope and moments of joy in the gloom. Let me reach you. Come and See.

So try and fight the desire to check your phone every few minutes, respond to texts and emails constantly, indulge in the social media feeds that just reinforce your own world views , fight the desire to pour another drink, eat another ready meal or packet of biscuits or bar of chocolate when you know you will be harming your long term health.

Fight the desire in the next few critical weeks of the pandemic to be a bit free with lockdown interpretations, meaning the downturn in cases won't be as fast as it could be.

Turn to Jesus for help . Turn to St Mary's for contact. Turn to the Gospels - the life of Jesus- for strength. Jesus is saying “Come and See , Come and Follow Me - I can give you fullness of life, an ability to face despair, the courage to ask for help, true peace when you repent and are forgiven, the self esteem to start again. “

Jesus is saying “Trust my love that I have for you, because I am the light of the world and the darkness will never overcome this light”

Amen

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