

Reflection for the 3rd Sunday before Advent

7 November 2021

We don't know if Simon, Andrew, James and John had met Jesus before or had heard him preaching. But we are told by Mark that while they were merrily going along their way carrying out their own tasks preparing for more fishing, in both cases the brothers immediately left what they were doing to follow Jesus.

Why did they do that? They must have thought that they could trust this man to lead them and that the task was worthwhile.

I wonder if they really had any idea of where they were going or what they would be doing or how they would survive? They left the comfort and certainty of their homes and families and they left their jobs as fishermen which was their source of income and status within the community. All to follow Jesus. We don't know in detail what they left behind and we don't know what they expected their life to be like following Jesus. But we do know that follow him they did.

If they had heard him preaching they must have admired him and been convinced by his teaching. There must have had level of trust in him that he was someone special and that he knew what he was doing so that things would work out for good and they would be alright in what would be a nomadic existence. But did they consider the hardships that they might face? Did they think all would be plain sailing? Or were they up for a challenge? Whatever they thought they must have had a high level of trust in the man Jesus.

These brothers, these ordinary people were being asked by Jesus to follow him. Just like people down the ages

and us now. Jesus is calling us to a new life following him. A life in all its fullness. Like them we don't know where it will take us but if we have faith and a trust in him it will be the right thing to do to live a God guided life.

This is not to say that life will suddenly become easy and problem free. The same demands may be placed upon us by work and family, but when we face them with the Lord by our side they take on a different quality. We may still find ourselves in a time of trial, through health or finances but God will provide for us in different ways as we trust in him.

I was reading this week of a vicar who over 30 years ago was working in Ecuador where he met a widow who had brought her only child to the hospital. The boy was dying following a deadly snake bite, but she had no means to buy what was needed to save his life. She just sat on the floor at the bottom of his bed not able to look at him in his agony. The vicar immediately decided to rush off to the nearest city to buy the anti-venom and blood transfusion he needed.

He prayed throughout the three-hour journey that the boy would still be alive when he returned. The boy miraculously survived and eventually mother and son returned to their home in the foothills of the Andes. A couple of months later he wanted to see how they were doing but didn't know exactly where they lived. He asked local people and took a horse-back ride up a mountain-side to eventually find the isolated shack that was their home. It was the poorest of dwellings. They sat outside on two boxes, and she soon laid out a small line of corn that terminated at her feet. After a while a chicken came around and started eating the corn until it gobbled up the last piece of maize and she grabbed it round the neck, stuffing it into a sack and handed it to him whilst thanking him profusely for the life of her child. He didn't need it, he didn't want it, it was her only source of nutrition and he begged her to keep it.

Her final words that ended the discussion were ‘the God who sent you to save my boy’s life will find food for us to eat tomorrow.’

The story ended there so I don’t know what happened after that but it certainly showed a woman whose trust in God was complete and both she and the vicar had followed their God given instincts and promptings to be where they were and to do what they did.

Where is God leading us to deepen our faith, and put our trust in him?

We are all different and are at different stages of our journey of faith. So we mustn’t compare ourselves with others. Our challenges of today may be more or less than those around us but they might have faced difficult things in the past and might face different things in the future.

If we trust in God we might not know where it is leading us but we know we are on a journey with our heavenly father and guided by the Holy Spirit.

Now we might not then be called to fish for people but I am sure that by following God’s way others will see and be drawn to the possibility of themselves turning to God.

Now some of us may feel that we have failed God we may have drifted away, we may feel we have done too much wrong or are not worthy. But that is to misunderstand how God works.

He is all loving, and forgives those who want to repent and pardons the sins that we have committed. He is there for us in the good times but especially in the difficult and challenging times. He will not desert us and in fact will keep the communication channel open and waits for us to respond to him. And he is more patient than we can ever imagine and is happy when we turn to him in all our frailty and misgivings.

The disciples surely had no idea what was coming next, nevertheless, they chose to follow, it appears, without much of a second thought. And as they left their familiar way of life behind them, Jesus led them into a world of adventure, of risk, of surprise and of sacrifice.

Where might God be calling us out of the familiar? Where might he be asking for some say, in the day-to-day routine of our life? When we trust, God provides. Whether we find ourselves in a desert place, low on reserves and fighting the doubts, or standing on familiar, comfortable ground, God's call is to trust and to follow. And as we choose to do so, he will give us the resources we need to face any challenges and make any changes. When we trust, God provides.

As we say in Psalm 42:

O put your trust in God; for I will yet give him thanks, who is the help of my countenance, and my God.

Amen