

Do Something Different

Mark 1: 14-20

At the beginning of our Bible passage today, Jesus is wandering along the beach, next to the Sea of Galilee, watching people at work. He approaches Simon and Andrew and interrupts their daily work – casting their nets into the sea - with a very strange proposal: *'Follow me and I will make you fishers of men (or people).'* The text tells us that they immediately put down their nets and follow. He then wanders a little further and comes across James and John who, with their father, were in their boat, mending their nets. *'Immediately he called them'*, we read, *'and they left their father Zebedee in the boat, with the hired servants, and went away after him.'* Had I been in either boat that day, I'm not sure I'd have responded so readily. We must assume, however, that there was more to the conversation than this statement, and that this wasn't the first time that Simon and Andrew, James and John had come across Jesus. It's likely that they had been in the crowd as Jesus went into Galilee, proclaiming the Good News of God. They'd have heard his message that *'The Kingdom of God is near'* and may well have stayed to talk long after the rest of the crowd had drifted away. No doubt they'd already felt the magic of his presence and the power of what he had to say. Working men in a rural area don't simply leave their livelihood, particularly when it's a family business, and wander off up the road with some stranger who has just appeared and said something bizarre to them.

But maybe this is Mark's point. Something in what Jesus said gave each set of brothers a glimpse of a new way of seeing, and this was enough to tease their imagination and tickle their curiosity.

Whatever was said between Jesus and the two sets of brothers, and whatever they might or might not have understood Jesus to be about, we know that they responded to his call and went with him. But this means that they had to leave some things behind them. A feature of Mark's understanding of what it meant for people to respond to Jesus' call to see differently and live differently is that it always involved leaving some things behind. In other words, there's always a cost to discipleship, always a change of circumstances.

In one sense, we see this throughout the Scriptures. Abraham and Sarah had to leave Ur in order to follow God's call. The blessing of all nations through him can only be realised if Abraham leaves and goes on a journey. Similarly, Moses

had to leave Egypt and then, later, the home and place of refuge and security, in order to follow God's call. He also had to leave behind his reluctance, lack of self-confidence and fear of failure. Throughout the Bible, there are countless examples of people who, however feebly and falteringly, followed God's call by leaving behind either places, things, securities or people.

But, if we're honest, Jesus isn't asking of them anything he hasn't already done himself. Furthermore, it's unrealistic anyway to think that it's ever possible to go on a journey from one place to another taking everything with you. However much we try, it simply can't be done.

In calling Simon and Andrew, and then James and John, from their ordinary work that day, Jesus is making it clear that anyone who chooses to go with him for a walk up the beach, must leave something behind in order to go. What's more, these two sets of brothers have no idea what lies in store for them, where the journey will take them, or how their lives will ultimately change. And Jesus doesn't tell them. Not in this passage or at this point in time.

Jesus called these simple folk – they weren't drawn from the religious elite or the aristocracy – they were fishermen, ordinary people. He called them from their ordinary day's work, catching fish and mending nets, with a simple summons – *'Follow me!'* And what does he offer them? He offers them a task. He called them not to a life of ease, but to a life of service. He called them to a task in which they would have to spend themselves and burn themselves up, and, in the end, die for his sake and for the sake of others. He called them to a task wherein they could win something for themselves only by giving their all to him and to others.

In short, these first disciples had no idea of what lay in store for them. All that they had to rely on was the knowledge that Jesus himself had called them. Had called them to see differently, to be brave enough and curious enough to want to explore what this might mean, and to be reckless enough to trust that the relationship with Jesus is enough to make the rest of it seem less important or vital. Happiness is never once offered or guaranteed. All that is promised is a journey with Jesus into the unknown. Discipleship still starts here – even 2,000 years later and in a very different place and culture.

People change direction in life frequently today. Almost no-one has a job for life anymore; many people have several careers. What must it feel like to retrain and begin a new line of work? How might this relate to the story of the

disciples abandoning their careers in fishing and following Jesus? Is this a life choice the disciples make, or a response to being chosen by Jesus? Can anything from their earlier lives prepare them for their new life following Jesus?

If we think of fishermen, they need the patience and the ability to endure hours in the hot sun or the cold wind. They need to notice the movement of the water that reveals the presence of the fish. They need strength to haul a big fish and gentleness to land it. These are all transferable qualities. Sharing God's message also demands patience and endurance, sensitivity to other people and careful attention to the ways of bringing them into Jesus' presence. No wonder Jesus spoke about becoming 'fishers of people'! But what about the skills that we've developed over the course of our work and lives? How might God make use of these as resources for sharing the good news of Jesus Christ with our family, friends and neighbours?

I love that the disciples were in their daily routine when Jesus came and called to them. With so much to do, and pressure from others to work, especially in the family business, and to make money, it would have been easy for them to have ignored him, or to have put him off to a time that was more convenient. I wonder where in our daily routines Jesus is speaking to us. Are we missing his voice as we struggle to complete all that is expected of us by family, colleagues and friends? If we were to hear him, what would we expect him to say? And would we be willing to change what we're doing if he asks us to?

Prayer by the monastic and mystic Thomas Merton:

Lord, we often have no idea where we're going. We don't see the road ahead and cannot know for certain where it will lead. Nor do we really know ourselves, and the fact that we think we're following your will does not mean that we're actually doing so. But we believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. And we hope that we have that desire in all we do. We hope that we'll never do anything apart from that desire. In Jesus' name, Amen.