

CALLED TO..... (26TH Jan 2020 Lindfield)

Matthew 4: 12-23

John is in prison. Jesus withdraws to a small town, Capernaum. Maybe it was put to further distance between himself and Herod. Maybe it was to go somewhere new so he could be anonymous to work out what he would do next. Whatever the reason Matthew makes it clear it was part of God's plan as this was to be Jesus' base of operations for some time.

Like John, Jesus begins by preaching a message of repentance but the reason was different. John preached repentance because the Messiah, God's promised One was about to appear whereas Jesus preached repentance because the Kingdom of God was near. Matthew makes it clear that the both messages are really one and the same.

He begins by gathering a band of followers – the custom of all rabbis (teachers) in that day. He embarks on his mission of teaching, preaching and healing.

While a lot is happening here the one thing that strikes me is the sense of calling that permeates the passage. The call to John the Baptist, even though it led to his imprisonment, Jesus' call to the crowds to perceive and become a part of God's in-breaking kingdom, followed by his call to a few specific fishermen, those he has called as his disciples to catch all kinds of people in the net of God's grace.

There are different kinds of callings, yet each is of God.

Ministers often speak of their "calling". In interviews with Selection Committees etc they are often asked to describe their "call" to the Ministry. Yet, if I asked you, or the members of any congregation, I would wager that not many would feel they were "called" to what they do or are. Ministers are a bit different in that our work, faith, family and many other facets of our lives are all bound together in our ministry. But I suggest that many others do not see such a connection between what they believe and what they do day by day. That is not to say they don't seek to be faithful disciples but there is a difference between the two.

I believe the difference is that we too often relate "calling" to what we do rather than who we are. God's call isn't about *doing* anything but rather about *being* something – a child of God. Maybe being comes before doing. Maybe being even makes doing possible. Is that what made John the Baptist able to proclaim the coming Messiah and challenge the powers that be, even if it meant imprisonment -that he knew God had called him to *be* the

forerunner? Is that what summoned such an immediate response from Peter and Andrew, James and John, that they felt called to *be* more than they had imagined? They probably had no clue what it meant to be a "fisher of men". They evidently thought that Jesus saw something in them, something of value and worth. They had no idea where they will go or what they will do, but they do know that Jesus is calling them to *be* his disciples, and they trust that the rest will become clear in time.

We are called to BE rather than DO. A couple of weeks ago I spoke about Jesus' Baptism and that he and we were given a new name: *beloved*. If we understand that we are called to be something: God's beloved child the rest will follow. It will affect how we do, what we do. We will act in a certain way because of who we are – or because of whose we are.

Calling doesn't stop with us as individuals. It also applies to our congregations. We focus much attention on what we DO as a congregation or what we should be doing, but maybe we should concentrate on who we are as a congregation. What is our identity? In 2014 we adopted a Mission Statement. We saw ourselves as being a people who sought: TO LIVE BY FAITH, BE KNOWN BY LOVE, BE A VOICE OF HOPE. If that is who we are, how does that translate to what we do? Every activity should be geared to expressing one or more of those 3 components of our being.

Some churches are more ambitious than that. They offer a far more detailed statement of who they see themselves as being. If you attend Coventry Cathedral you will see this statement on the door: *UNIDENTIFIED MAN: We extend a special welcome to those who are single, married, divorced, widowed, straight, gay, confused, well-heeled or down-at-heel. We especially welcome wailing babies and excited toddlers. We welcome you whether you can sing like Pavarotti or just growl quietly to yourself. You're welcome here if you're just browsing, just woken up or just got out of prison. We don't care if you're more Christian than the Archbishop of Canterbury or haven't been to church since Christmas 10 years ago. We extend a special welcome to those who are over 60 but not grown up yet and to teenagers who are growing up too fast.*

We welcome keep-fit mums, football dads, starving artists, tree huggers, latte sippers, vegetarians, junk food eaters. We welcome those who are in recovery or still addicted. We welcome you if you are having problems, are down in the dumps or don't like organized religion. We're not keen on it either. We offer welcome to those who think the earth is flat, work too hard, can't spell, or are here because Granny is visiting and wanted to come to the cathedral. We welcome those who are inked, pierced, both or neither.

We offer a special welcome to those who could use a prayer right now, had religion shoved down their throats as kids or got lost on the Ring Road and wound up here by mistake. We welcome pilgrims, tourists, seekers, doubters and you.

I wonder how many congregations could honestly say that? How much of that could we honestly adopt?

Even if we don't fully understand what being a child of God really involves, if we stay committed to being, the doing will work itself out. When I was doing a counselling course many years ago now, my mentor, herself a Christian, reminded me of something I have never forgotten and have found it most helpful and inspiring over the years: God made human Beings, NOT human HAVings or human DOings. When we concentrate on being who we are, who we are called to be, then whatever we do with our lives we will also be the disciples of Christ – a Calling to which we all have responded. AMEN
