**3rd March 2019**

**Walking the Way of Jesus 1. Call to discipleship**

**Luke 5.1-11**

You may have noticed that we now have a new mission statement. Accepted at our last church meeting a couple of weeks ago, a church meeting at which we agreed to progress with work to refurbish our upper hall and kitchen thanks to God’s provisions of the funds, especially a generous anonymous donation of £35,000. God is good – we have a lot to be thankful for, as Gladys would say.

After a lengthy consultation we finally agreed on the wording. Our new mission statement is ‘***Inspired by Jesus, walking His way of radical love, making a difference in this world***’.

We wanted to name Jesus.

We are not the Rotary, Lions or Round Table. They do good work, give of their time and money to good causes. But what should define us is that we are a Christ centred community. Jesus calls us together. We are inspired by Him. The gospel animates us and gives us direction.

Three gospels record the story of Jesus calling the fishermen. Luke’s version includes much more detail than the other two. Luke pictures the scene, probably a little cove where a crowd has gathered to hear Jesus.

So, with these fishermen listening to his every word he turns the spotlight on them. They haven’t caught any fish and although its daylight, when the fish are less likely to be caught because they can see the nets, Jesus tells them to put out into deep water and let down your nets. Simon is at first sceptical but decides to give Jesus a chance. The rest as they say is history. The nets are bulging with a huge catch. Simon prostrates himself in awe. ‘Go Lord, leave me, sinner that I am!’ But Jesus doesn’t go. He instead tells them not to be afraid – from now on they will be catching people.

The fishermen will become fishers of men – or as our inclusive version says they will fish for people. And so, they leave everything and follow him.

It’s a well-known and evocative story full of rich symbolism.

These fishermen were doing the things they normally do but it wasn’t working.

And maybe deep down they were looking for a deeper satisfaction. A deeper call on their lives.

Symbolically in this story Jesus tells these fishermen to put out into the deep.

When I was learning to swim, I remember the instructor saying stay in the shallow end – don’t go into the deep end. And I was terrified of crossing that line. Being in the early 1970s Jaws had just come out as a movie and I think I had this fear that the deep end was shark infested.

We use the expression ‘we are in too deep’ – to suggest that we have taken on too much – or what we are involved in is beyond our means, our competency, and our knowledge. We talk about being in deep do dos when it gets really bad.

Other people talk about people going deep when they start talking about their emotions or deep feelings, or values or faith. I’ve been in conversations with people and say we get talking about what happens after death and they say, ‘oh that’s a bit too deep for me!’ – They don’t want to go there- because they might be afraid to confront such issues– better to stay on the surface – stay with the superficial stuff of life – don’t go deep.

I’m not sure whether Luke intended the symbolism but it’s there to be used by an imaginative preacher – Jesus saying go deep – don’t be afraid.

Where do you feel Jesus maybe calling you to go deep at this moment in time? What for you are the scary deep waters? The places where you may be stretched and challenged. The deep of your own emotions and faith.

Discipleship is not about Sunday only Christians but about seven day a week lifestyle. Walking the Way suggests a journey – we haven’t made it, but we are following, stumbling at times but still moving, humbly walking with our God. The expression is biblical as the first followers of Jesus were known as the Way.

The phrase ‘walking his way’ also comes from a national initiative by the United Reformed Church to emphasise discipleship. It reminds us that believing in Jesus is not enough. You don’t tick the box and book your seat in heaven. It is about living out the way of Christ: how are we loving our enemy, forgiving others, dealing with our anger, serving the least, offering hospitality to all- living a kingdom of God lifestyle? The Way of Jesus sets our direction and gives us the parameters for the journey and what we are about. It is the central feature of being a ‘Christ’ian church. We are not going to be embarrassed about that nor hide it from anyone.

Jesus shapes who we are.

 I’ve been reading a book by Ken Costa, who is an internationally renowned investment banker and a committed Christian, called *Know Your Why[[1]](#endnote-1)*

In the book he explores the topic of call and vocation. ‘Why am I here?’ ‘Where should I be going? What should I be doing?

The difficulty is how to work out how to follow that call. What does it look like practically for each one of us? What does the great commission have to say specifically to you at 7.45 on a Monday morning in a traffic jam or crammed into a commuter train? What does it mean to act justly and love mercy while serving coffee to strangers all day? How do we play our part in God’s great plan for the world?

Jesus taught that we are not on earth by accident but by a clear intention of God for lives to be lived well and in tune with God’s desires.

Our calling comes before our destiny. We need to understand the person God created before we can begin to understand the person God created us to be.

*Who I am* before *why I am*.? So often we try to skip the first to end up with the second. We talk about our jobs in a functionally defining way, as if to say, ‘this is my destiny and my identity rolled in one’.

Ken Costa thinks of a friend whose identity was so tied up in his work as an accountant that he had a near breakdown when he left his job. After he left the office, he began the painful process of asking ‘who am I’?

We often talk about someone having an identity crisis. In reality very few people go through life without facing real questions about their identities.

Costa writes about a young woman who held a senior position in an advertising firm but took time away from work to bring up her two small children. She struggled for years to rediscover her true identity as her days were filled with mundane chores and she could no longer rely on her potion at work to define her. And yet she knew that for that season of her life, her primary calling was to her family. She took on some part time work to break the routine of the day and gradually grew to enjoy her decision to stay at home. And then her calling changed as the circumstances changed. The children grew up and she could go back to full time work. But she learned a great lesson: she knew that she did not need to have her identity defined by her job. She was freer and happier in her own skin for being the person god wanted her to be.

Through all the changes, God’s love was the constant. The call to follow Christ was the direction. Not just who am I – but ‘*who am I in Christ*?’ We are defined in relationship with someone else.

 I am no longer the arbiter of success in my life. I am loved by someone else. If we come to the end of a phase at work, then we are tempted to think of ourselves as having no further value. But if we are secure in our identities, we know that the end of an era is not the end of our destinies. There is always more to come.

Costa calls us to strengthen the core of our being. Like going to the gym or a Pilates class, they tell you to strengthen the core to be able to cope with the demands of the exercise. The core is our relationship to Christ. Out of that relationship we have our security and conviction. This is why and how we do what we do. Relationship holds us together.

You have a friend to follow not just a boss to answer to.

Very often when people talk about calling, they try to remove human autonomy from the equation. These fishermen had a choice to follow or not. The call of Christ is not blind obedience. It’s more like leaving a house with a friend on a journey. You both have a shared destination in mind and a map to get you there, but there are many routes you could take along the way and you work it out with conversation and relationship. Sometimes your friend might suggest strongly that you take a certain path. Perhaps she knows something about the way ahead that you don’t. Sometimes you might insist on taking a wrong turn and you have to allow your friend to get you back on the right path. But you work it out together. That is what I believe it means to follow your calling with Christ. Your opinions, passions desires, really matter. We are not called to be robots.

A recent Alpha Course meeting on guidance said God guides and calls through common sense, through the counsel of the saints, through commanding scripture, through circumstantial signs, through a compelling spirit. Sometimes it needs all those to counter check each other to discern the call. But sometimes people are afraid that if they follow the call of Christ, they will end up doing the thing they least like to do. I don’t believe that God is like that. I believe God usually works with the grain rather than against the grain of our personalities and gifting. Going deep is discovering where our deepest desires are – what gives us energy – where is our passion – let Jesus call us on.

Vocation and calling are not just for people wearing funny shirts like me – though we do need people to hear a call into Christian ministry for the future of the church. But Jesus calls us to follow him in all sorts of places – from industry to public service – from volunteering to the homemaking. Listen for His call – don’t be afraid.

God gives us passions for a reason. He will not call us to something that makes us miserable or that is a vast waste of our talents. Frederick Buechner, an American Presbyterian minister wrote: the place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet’. The fact that we are passionate about something is often a sign that this is where God’s calling us to be. Finding our passions- answering the question ‘what do you want?’ – is therefore crucial to finding our callings. Rarely is that question easily answered. Often, we want different things at different times in our lives

So, it was for these first disciples. They didn’t know what they wanted – only that they were searching for something, someone. Jesus gives some direction to the disciples – I’ll make you fish for people – but doesn’t spell out too clearly what that will mean. They just have to follow and find out in the unfolding of time.

Some people wake up every morning knowing that there is nothing they would rather do than go to work. Some are more ambivalent – some need work to just pay the bills and are not necessarily looking for work satisfaction. Some struggle with the menial tasks, the prevalent bureaucracy, the high stress levels and deadlines and stagnant downtime. Again. It can be the clarity of our callings and the strength of our core relationships that can carry us through the chores.

Costa writes that one of the great fallacies we face is that everyday should be a peak of fulfilled activity. The world seldom works that way. It’s an unreal and unsustainable view. Perseverance is part of life.

 There is a story about a rock star who was struggling to adjust to the dull monotony of normal life, as he was so used to the adrenaline rush of the stage. He went through every day expecting to experience the moments of euphoria that he felt when performing to thousands at a concert and he found himself empty and unfulfilled when those moments didn’t appear. So, he went to see his counsellor, excepting some clear, quick, and helpful advice. To his annoyance, the counsellor simply said, ‘when you wake up each morning, make your own bed, clean your own shoes and make your own cup of tea. Come back and let me know how you got on.

Despite his scepticism, the rock star came back the next week having learned a great lesson. The little acts of normality had helped him see that all of us have to get through chores and can’t expect every second of every day to be pumped. Depression and low feelings are often fuelled by unrealistic expectations. We need to take ownership of and embrace the little acts that make up such a huge part of our lives. If we are constantly searching for the next euphoric experience, we’ll enter into a dangerous cycle.

What does it mean to be a Christian witness in the secular workplace? To be fishers of people at work?

Imagine someone working in a junior role in an accounting firm who talks to her colleagues about Jesus whenever the opportunity arises and invites them along to church but never really gets anywhere with it. Her colleagues get bored of her going on about faith and shut her down. How can she have a calling in the workplace when no one wants to hear?

But a Christian calling in the workplace goes beyond straight up evangelism but transformers of society: salt and light.

Even in this story of the fishermen – they were called to be fishers of people. When you catch fish, you transfer them from one environment – the water – into another environment – the net. They are transformed. when you act with love in everything you do, love to God and love of your neighbour, you are being salt and light – transforming the environment around you, walking the way of Jesus – Jesus came to transform the world – to show mercy, forgiveness, bring healing and reconciliation, justice, peace. Think bigger than just winning converts!

It is argued that the rise of Christianity down not so much to people talking about Jesus but to a community that were living his message. In an ancient world that worshipped the gods and goddesses the early Christians no longer went to pagan festivals or sacrifices disturbing their neighbours y their different attitudes. Their neighbours came to realize that this strange Jesus community was also being kind to the poor, looking after the sick and teaching people to read. They no longer seemed angry and hostile and were living in a radically different way. People began saying to them: ‘we don’t know what you’ve got, but it seems to be a new way of being human’.

Next week we will consider the temptations in life, especially in the workplace, to distract us from our calling.

Inspired by Jesus, walking his way of radical love, making a difference in this world. That’s our call.

1. Ken Costa, *Know Your Why*, Thomas Nelson, 2016 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)