

Sermon for St Mark's and Grantchester

### **Mark 1:14-20 – Jesus calls by name**

Before training for ordination, I was a youth pastor at a church in London. The church front door faced onto a pedestrian crossing leading to the main exit of a busy underground station. One of my favourite games was to spot young people or volunteers or just friends as they were waiting to cross towards church and then call and wave at the very top of my voice to them and not stopping until they'd made it to the other side"

"Hi ALEX. Alex hello. Its me!! HIIIIIIII"

At theological college we talk a lot about the idea of "call" and being "called". I wonder how you feel about being called? Have you ever really sensed the call of Jesus calling you specifically into relationship with him? Have you ever responded to that call? This morning I'd like to explore a few aspects of the call of Jesus as we see it in this passage in Mark's gospel.

This passage acts as something of a summary of the next ½ of marks book. Indeed it is something of a summary of Jesus' entire ministry in Mark's eyes. John has prepared the way, Jesus has been baptised and then taken to the desert to be tempted. Our reading is the transition where the way has been prepared and Jesus returns to shake things up. The arrival of Jesus was the inauguration of something new – The kingdom of God had drawn near. There is good news to share and to believe.

In the upcoming chapters Jesus will demonstrate the arrival of this Kingdom news by teaching, healing, and performing exorcisms. Yet in Mark's account, his first act is to call some fishermen to follow him. The first action of Jesus' new Kingdom is to call people to follow, to enter a relationship with him. This is significant. The kingdom of God is people centred. About bringing people into covenant relationship. Not a generic call to anyone. But a specific call to individuals, the kingdom is built one person at a time entering into a relationship with Jesus.

#### **Called by Jesus**

The first aspect of this call is that it is initiated by Jesus. Jesus leaves the desert, returns to Galilee and makes his way to the waterfront. Jesus calls to Simon, Andrew, James and John. They are not searching him out, they are not looking for someone to follow. They are with their businesses, doing their jobs, getting on with life as normal. Jesus breaks in and calls them.

As a church we often talk about following Jesus, about the task of being disciples, about good spiritual habits such as prayer, reading the bible, receiving communion, joining a small group. Those are all good things, but the first and most important aspect of discipleship is that Jesus is the caller. Jesus is the initiator. When we do mission in our communities we want to join with what Jesus is already doing by his Spirit. It is Jesus who brings us into relationship with God. Jesus who has brought the Kingship of God near to us, and will bring

it in its fullness later. Jesus is calling us, Jesus is discipling us, Jesus is completing his renewal of us. This is Jesus' work.

If you are sitting in church this morning and feel unworthy to be called, then you are in good company with Simon, Andrew, James, John and Alan. If you read on through Mark's gospel it becomes clear that these disciples are not always excellent. But it is not down to us. It is Jesus work and we respond to his invitation.

### **Response Required**

Jesus' call demands a response. The 4 men we meet in this story face a choice – walk away from business as usual or reject the call. Follow or be left behind. That may sound harsh but remember the story of the rich young ruler, Jesus told him to leave his life behind and follow. He walked away sad. If you have never responded to the call of Jesus, or never understood that he was calling you, or have rejected his advances then perhaps this morning is the time for you to decide to follow him.

### **Called individually but placed in Community**

Jesus called the disciples specifically. He didn't put an ad in the Galilee Gazette. He didn't host a weekly competition where contestants complete themed challenges in The Great Judean Disciple Off.

Jesus went to the sea to call these 4 men. He knew them and called them in this moment at this time.

You are known. There may be someone here who has felt overlooked their entire life. Someone who has never felt seen or known. Someone who has never felt like they were the ones being called by anyone. Jesus' kingdom is near and it is a kingdom that calls you by name. Particularly those who might be overlooked.

The purpose of his call is multifaceted. It is a call to follow, a call into relationship with Jesus, a call into a community and a call to be sent back out to fish for people. Jesus did not call a community, but he called individuals and brought them into community. Look around you in church this morning, these are the community of Jesus' followers that you are with. These are those who will help to shape you as disciples as you figure out what following looks like together. Our following needs to involve these 3 elements, our relationship with Jesus, the community we are in learning together, and the ways we are sent back out to tell more people of the good news.

### **Called beyond yourself**

This is one of the startling elements of this call of Jesus that I want to focus on for a few moments. Here, at the start of his public ministry, Jesus is already looking beyond his death, beyond his resurrection, and beyond his ascension at those who will continue the work of proclaiming the good news of the kingdom. The elongated closing of Mark's gospel bookends this idea with the commissioning of the disciples to go into all the world and proclaim the good news to the whole creation. Jesus is building something that will outlive himself and as the disciples spread the work and plant churches they too look to build something that will outlive them. The call of Jesus is live long and beyond, it outlasts you. In my experiences churches have been quite good in recent years at 5 year plans. The diocese of London where I was based before training had "Capital vision 2020". That is a good thing,

but don't we also need to have a vision for the next 50 or 100 years. How are we planting trees that we will not see grow. Who is going to come after, how are we laying groundwork, looking after buildings or developing buildings, developing our children's and young people's work, leaving resources and relationship and Christlike people, and particularly this week being proactive in how our environmental measures, so that when we are gone those who come after can push on in proclaiming the good news about Jesus. The fruit of your life of following Jesus needs to continue to be produced.

Close it out with a story. . .

I was listening to a podcast recently and an episode that talked about a church planter in the united states. He was never the celebrity pastor, but he faithfully planted churches right up until the day before his death. It is estimated that there are over 250 churches across America that he and his church helped to plant with coaching and finances. The true weight of the man, and his dedication to the calling of Jesus on his life, is that he had no idea what that number was. Yet there are churches across the country, proclaiming the good news every day, bringing the kingdom near to people, because he was willing to build beyond himself.

My dad has recently retired after 40ish years in full time ordained Christian ministry. He was a presbyterian minister. He worked for 3 different churches including one that he planted – the church I grew up in. In Northern Irish terms, he did not have a huge ministry, he was never the poster boy for ministerial success. But he was faithful in following Jesus, in developing the communities he was in and in being sent to fish for people. His greatest gift I think, was his willingness to give people a chance at using their gifts. He let people try many programmes, many ideas, let people preach and lead services (a big deal for the presbys), and held joint services with the local roman catholic church to the extent that he was protested against by some of his own colleagues. Yet despite those challenges, he has faithfully ministered to hundreds of people, who have each gone on to reach many others. The church that he planted is still there with a new minister growing and developing the work. The church he

There is a former south African international cricketer named Tich Smith who became addicted to alcohol, ruining his sporting career. He became a Christian in 1986 and married Joan in 1991. In 1997 Tich had a vision of a village on a hill for South African children – particularly orphans. He says “there were clusters of small homes surround by children running and laughing, mothers were sitting on the steps of these houses. The church was in the centre. There were schools and a skills/business development centre I saw fields of vegetable gardens. God told me to build the village so that orphan children can know Him as their faith, to create jobs for rural communities to sustain their families and the government will come and see why it works, and we can point them to the cross.”

They bought an 83 acre farm and In 2009 they opened LIV – a village just like the one described above. Today there are 5 different communities across south Africa supporting hundreds of vulnerable people.

Cambridge Colleges – Bateman.