

St. Andrews Lutheran Church, Tallebudgera

21st January 2024 – Third Sunday after Epiphany

Mark 1:16-20

COME ON, THEN

It is probably a well-known ‘truth’ by many people that those who go fishing like to tell a good story, often very embellished, about their fishing exploits and particularly their near misses. As one who likes to wet the line I sometimes take offence at this generalisation, but confess that I have known others I fish with to do this, while never of course myself over exaggerating the size of the fish I have nearly caught.

When we talk fishing stories, though, there is none greater than the one we have in our first reading for this Sunday, the story of Jonah. Jonah was called by God to go the city of Nineveh, to tell the people there to stop sinning and turn back to God. Going to a large city, alone, and taking the people there a message of repentance or destruction didn’t appeal to Jonah, not surprisingly, so instead he hopped on a ship that was headed in the other direction. God came after Jonah in the form of a great storm, and when the sailors on that ship threw Jonah overboard to still the storm, he was swallowed by a large fish/whale God sent along. Three days inside that very fishy place was enough to convince Jonah to follow God’s call to go to Nineveh after all. And then, in the first reading we have today, we see the result of Jonah finally following God’s call; the people of Nineveh did indeed change their lives and turn back to God. As hard as God’s call first seemed to Jonah, when he stayed faithful to it God made it come to fruition.

Staying on the topic of fishing stories, we have the story of Jesus calling the first of the disciples in today’s Gospel from Mark 1; Simon and Andrew, and then James and John. While this story doesn’t involve an amazing natural event like Jonah living in the belly of a sea creature for three days and nights, what happens here is still very surprising. Try and picture the scene; fishermen by a lake, some fishing, others sorting their catch, others mending their nets. The smell of the water and

fresh fish is on the air. The sound of the fishermen with their commands and their banter, and the call of the sea birds which are always around when fish scraps are to be had. Jesus is walking along the shore when he comes to two men, Simon (later to be Peter) and Andrew, casting out their nets. Jesus says, "Follow me! I will teach you how to bring in people instead of fish." (v. 17) and straight away, we are told, they left their nets and followed Him. After that Jesus passed two others, James and John, in a boat with their father and other workers. At the call of Jesus, 'Come on, then', these two also just got up and left and followed Him. I always wonder about what their father's reaction was? Did he call out, was he angry, or did he just let his sons go off when there was work to be done? We don't know why these four future disciples followed Jesus so quickly. Had they heard about Him from others? Had they themselves heard Him speak and teach? Or did Jesus just have a charisma like no one else we have ever heard of, so that when He said, 'Come on, then', people came?

There are many questions from both the Jonah account, and Jesus calling these disciples, that we just don't know the answers to. But there are also some important and basic truths about what it means to be a follower of Jesus, a disciple, which we can learn from them also. Firstly, from Jonah, we learn that no matter how overwhelming the call may seem to be, no matter how daunting, no matter how far we may feel that what we are called to do is above what we realistically can do, when God calls us to do something He is with us and working in and through us. God doesn't call us to do something which He hasn't equipped us and prepared us for. Nor does God just leave us alone to work it out by ourselves when we follow His call, but He assures us that He is always with us.

None of us are likely to be called to go to a foreign city and tell the people there to turn from their sins and turn back to God, but we are still, like Jonah, sometimes called to serve and follow God in ways that may feel uncomfortable, out of our depth, too challenging for us. When we put that call into our everyday lives, accepting that God calls each one of us as His followers each day, what does this look like? Which parts of the Christian life do you find daunting, or just downright difficult? Is it loving everyone? Forgiving others? Putting our own desires behind helping others? Showing

others what God's love means to us, each day, in the way we talk, treat others, carry out our work and other roles, where we put our priorities in life? What are the things you try to get away from by making excuses, or trying to go in the other direction? God doesn't call you to be doing anything He doesn't believe you can do, but which of your callings feel like going to the city of Nineveh to you? And then to come back to the Gospel reading here. One of the big things about this account is that God calls us in our everyday lives; wherever we are and whatever we are doing. These four fishermen were called to leave their old lives, their livelihood, even their families, to take up the call, but it's not always so severe for us. But still, we are called to step out of our comfort zone, to take up the call where we are. The call of Jesus to follow Him, to live our lives in Him, to share the news of His love with others, comes to us in the things we do, the roles we play, the relationships we have, each day. What does that look like for us then? What are the boats and nets we are called to leave behind? This can relate to our closest relationships, our friends and church family, and even the attitude, words, and actions we take into wider society. What are we called to leave behind as we follow? Perhaps our selfishness, our stubbornness in always wanting things our own way, holding on to past hurts and grudges and not being prepared to move forward, holding on to the past, not being prepared to look at things through the eyes of others? We can each add to that list by ourselves.

That's looking at the call to discipleship in relation to others, but what about in relation to God? As God calls us what are the nets and the boats, the way of life, we are reluctant to leave behind so we can follow Him? Is it the things we know are wrong, and even bad for us and others, but we enjoy doing them so we find excuses and ways to justify them? Is it that there are so many good things to do in life, people to be with, activities to enjoy, that spending time in prayer, or Bible reading, or worship to be with the One who makes this all possible, just falls way down on our list of priorities? The call to follow Jesus, to step out and serve Him, comes to us not just once, but many times, each day. How do we respond to it?

We don't know whether the four fishermen we read about here knew anything about Jesus before they were called, or whether they just trustingly followed Him completely 'cold'. But when

we are called to follow, to be disciples, we know the One who is calling us. For our theme today I went with ‘Come on, then’, rather than simply ‘Follow me’, because the ‘then’ makes the point that the call is based on a relationship we already have; the love of God in Jesus which we already know. As we are called, it’s not by a stranger walking past as we do our daily tasks, but by the One we know who loves us, died for us, and gives us new life forever. We look to God as the One we know who has given us everything we have in our lives, including life itself, so we look to Him in love and thankfulness, and as we do He calls us to follow Him, ‘Come on, then’. Our call is based on our relationship with God. It is a call to step out, to sometimes do things we’d rather not do, give up what we’d rather not give up, let go of attitudes we’d rather keep hold of. But it’s a call we follow in trust knowing that Jesus, the ultimate show of God’s love for us, is the One who now calls us to follow Him.

In whatever we are called to keep doing, or not do, or begin to do, God is not only with us, but He has made us ready for it. In the lives we live each day, the people we are with, He calls us to follow His call to help others become a part of His Kingdom. Come on, then, and follow the call of the One who loves you, calls you, and is with you. And as we do this working in and with Him that makes a great fishing story. Amen.

FOR FURTHER DISCUSSION/REFLECTION

Consider the ways God calls you to be a disciple each day:

- What calls do you have which you find challenging, or daunting, or which you feel ill prepared and equipped for?
- What are you called to leave behind as you take up the call to ‘Come on, then’? What things are you called to stop doing? What are you called to start doing? What attitudes or actions is living as a disciple calling you to change?
- What does fishing for people look like in your life? How can you share and witness to God’s love in the relationships and situations God places you in each day?

Thank God for His love for us, and that He calls and equips us to be His disciples. Pray for the trust and confidence to step out and fish for Him in the ways He calls us to do.

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21.01.2024*