

Sunday 7th November 2021
3rd Sunday before Advent (B)

Liverpool Parish Church

OT: Jonah 3.1-5,10
NT: Hebrews 9.24-end
G: Mark 1.14-20

Day after day I get up, sort the breakfasts and packed lunches for the family and then go upstairs to my office- (unless I'm actually going to my real office in Liverpool) and I log onto my computer. I check my emails, check my task list and my performance data to see how much I need to try and get done in a day. I chair meetings on skype and I spend a lot of time telling people to mute their microphones unless they are actually speaking, I then type up the meetings and then sometimes I go and visit children and their families. Each day is more or less the same. By the way- I'm not moaning about it- I'm grateful to have my job, but most days are the same.

Simon and Andrew were casting their net into the sea for they were fishermen. Day after day it was the same thing; the same sea, the same net, the same boat. Day after day it was wind, water, fish, tired and aching bodies. They probably grew up watching their dad and grandad fishing, watching their future life, watching how they too would spend their time.

Cast the net, pull it in. Cast the net, pull it in. If you are not casting the net, then you sit in the boat mending the net. That's what James and John were doing. Casting and mending. Casting and mending.

We may not fish for a living but we know about casting and mending nets. Days that all seem the same. One looks like another. Life can become routine and nothing changes. We don't expect much to happen. This is our life if we are fortunate enough- we cast the nets. We mend the nets. Casting and mending to make a living, to feed our family, to pay the bills.

Casting and mending to gain security and to get to retirement (a long way off for me I hasten to add!). Casting and mending to hold our family together, to make our marriage and partnerships work, to bring up our children. Casting and mending to gain the things we want; a house, a car, books, clothes, a holiday- well that's quite awkward at the moment with Covid, but not impossible. Casting and mending to earn a reputation, gain approval, establish status. Casting and mending our way through another day of loneliness, sadness, or illness.

Casting and mending are realities of life. They are also the circumstances in which Jesus comes to us, the context in which we hear the call to new life, and the place where we are changed and the ordinary becomes the extraordinary.

These would be disciples, Simon and Andrew, James and John, are not looking for Jesus. They are too busy with the nets. It is another day of casting and mending. They may not have even noticed Jesus but he not only sees them he speaks to them. Jesus has a way of turning up in the ordinary places of life and interrupting the daily routines of casting and mending nets. That's what he did to the lives of Simon and Andrew, James and John. That's what he does to your life and my life.

It's also interesting to note that in the scene from Mark, Jesus is not calling individuals, but two sets of brothers to form a community of followers centred on Jesus. With this emphasis on community- this does not match up with the Western values of individualism, self-sufficiency and autonomy. This communal code of relationality, both with Jesus and with the other followers is what forms the basis of their interaction. This particular scene only focuses on four males called by Jesus. We do know that there were other males and indeed many females who accompanied Jesus on his mission.

“Follow me” is Jesus’ invitation to a new life. If these four fishermen accept the invitation, their lives will forever be different. They will be different. They will no longer catch just fish. They will fish for people.

When Jesus says, “I will make you fish for people,” he is describing the transformation of their lives, not simply a job catching new members or followers. He could just as easily have said to the carpenters, “Follow me, and you will build the kingdom of heaven.” To the farmers, “Follow me, and you will grow God’s people. To the doctors, “Follow me, and you will heal the brokenness of the world.” To the teachers, “Follow me, and you will open minds and hearts to the presence of God.” To the parents, “Follow me, and you will nurture new life.”

Whatever your life is, however you spend your time, there is in that life Jesus’ call to “Follow me.” “Follow me” is the call to participate with God in God’s own saving work. It’s the work of change and growth. That work is always about moving to a larger vision, moving our life in a new direction, and experiencing that our little story of life is connected to and a part of a much larger story of life, God’s life.

As Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee he saw Simon, Andrew, James, and John. Jesus called them. Mark records no discussions, no questions, no goodbyes. They simply “left... and followed him.”

I’m afraid that if Mark were writing about me – when he gets to the part when Jesus says, “Follow me” – Mark would write, “and immediately the questions followed.” “Where are we going? What will we do? How long will we be gone? What do I need to take? What shall I wear? Where will we stay?” The list would go on...

But this conversation doesn't take place in today's gospel. Jesus does not offer a map, an itinerary, or a destination, only an invitation. This is not the type of journey you can prepare for. This is the inner journey, a journey into the deepest part of our being, the place where God resides. It's not about planning and organising, making lists, or packing essentials. It's not that easy. If anything, this journey is about leaving things behind. Listen to what Mark says:

- "Immediately they left their nets and followed him."
- "They left their father Zebedee in the boat..., and followed him."

The invitation, "follow me," is also the invitation to leave behind; to leave behind our nets, our boats, and even our fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, children, wives, husbands and partners..

That's the hard part for most of us. We're quite good at accumulating and clinging but not so good at letting go. More often than not our spiritual growth involves some kind of letting go. We never get anywhere different as long as we're unwilling to leave where we are. We accept Jesus' invitation to follow, not by packing up, but by letting go.

"Follow me" is both the invitation to and the promise of new life. So what are the nets that entangle us? What are the little boats that contain our life? Who are the people from whom we seek identity, value, or approval? What do we need to let go of and leave behind so that we might follow him?

This is not about changing careers, disowning our family, or moving to a new city. It is about the freedom to be fully human without the trappings of disordered attachments and in so being discover God's divinity within us. We let go so that our life may be changed, so that we can now travel in a new direction, so that we may be open to receive the life of

God afresh. When we let go, everything is transformed – including our nets, boats, and families. That’s why Jesus could tell them they would still be fishermen. But now they would fish for people.

They wouldn’t become something they weren’t already, but they would be changed. They would become transformed fishermen. They would more authentically be who they already were.

Ultimately, it’s about letting go of our own little life so that we can receive God’s life. This letting go happens in the context of our everyday activities; work, school, families, paying the bills, cooking meals, relationships, and trying to do the right thing. It happens in the casting and mending of our nets. These are the times and places Jesus turns up and calls us into a new way of being and our world changes. It happened for Simon, Andrew, James, and John. It can and does happen for you and me.

Let us look at what is holding us back from fully following Jesus, from keeping him right at the centre of all that we do. Ponder this week how to let go and accept the call on our lives from Jesus.

Amen

Revd Jennifer Brady