

The gospel reading from the lectionary today is taken from Matthew's gospel and tells the remarkable story of the calling of the first disciples. It comes shortly after Matthew records the end of John the Baptist's public ministry. His arrest would lead to imprisonment and execution.

What is significant is that Jesus, far from moving out of Herod's reach, moved into the heart of his territory. He heads north to Capernaum, a fishing village by the lake of Galilee, and he deliberately, consciously echoes John's words in his proclamation of the Kingdom of God and his call to repentance.

It is against that background of political power flexing its muscles, of a time when to lie low seems the wise option that Jesus calls Simon, called Peter, and Andrew, and then along the shore line James and John. His call is simply and unequivocal "Come follow me," and at once they left their nets and followed him.

2000 years later we stand amazed at how this simple encounter changed the world. They stepped away from their provincial life and turned the world upside down. They began to write the first chapter of the adventure of faith, whose story is still being told in the lives of men and women who down the years and still today hear that call, welcome that kingdom, change direction and follow Jesus.

Yet impressive as it is something in us says, "This is not real This is not how it happens." Impressive though Jesus clearly was, authoritative as his call would have been, whether it was an invitation or a command or both, people don't just drop everything like that. If you only knew the problem I have getting people to sign up for the coffee rota after a service! There must be something more and of course there was. In their lives, as in most people's lives, there is a back story which, unless we know it, leaves us with unanswered questions or, more often, drawing wrong conclusions about why people are as they are and do as they do.

That is why listening matters so much on the journey to understanding. It is why ministers visit the homes of their congregation so that, in the privilege of the pastoral call, people can unpack and tell of their journey and share the milestones on the way.

How often at a funeral after a tribute people say to me "If only I had known" or "Now I understand." It takes time and trust and love and acceptance for people to share at a deep level, but it is always worth it.

So let me tell you the back story to this call, for we have it recorded for us in John's gospel, and this will make sense of this decisive moment we heard this morning.

The story starts in John's account with John the Baptist who told two men "Behold the Lamb of God" and they left John and started to follow Jesus. The greatness of John's character is never so clearly seen as when he said to his own followers, "Follow Jesus." The followers of Jesus increased because the followers of John decreased. John was big enough to say "He must increase, I must decrease, He must become greater, I must become less." That takes a very big man to see his own circle of influence shrink and not resent it. It is a big person who says "Follow Jesus, not me."

You have the sense that you are on the edge of something big, that change is in the air, that something is about to happen, and it was. And like someone straining to see a coming train you are on your toes looking intently to see what will happen, and you want to shout out "Look it is coming" or in this case "Looks he has come!"

This was the last occasion, as far as we know, that John was to see Jesus. It was also the first occasion, that these two disciples had seen Jesus. John's last glimpse was their first of Jesus. But one true glimpse of Jesus was enough for them to switch their allegiance from one leader to another.

There was Jesus walking along the river bank and the two disciples started to walk after him and they left John alone, standing still. It was a poignant moment. "Don't look at me. Look at him," They looked and then they followed. If you really look at Jesus no-one else will satisfy you will look for no other hero, for no other Saviour. Here is a wonderful thing. So often people we admire and look up to sadly prove to have feet of clay. "The closer you get to them the smaller they become." But not in the case of Jesus. My testimony and many others' is this "The closer you get to him the bigger he becomes." Once you have really looked at Jesus you are spoiled for everything else. "Turn your eyes upon Jesus."

Investigating Jesus is not like investigating anything else. As so often C S Lewis captures best what it means to start taking Jesus seriously.

"There comes a moment when the children who have been playing a burglars hush suddenly.. was that a real footstep in the hall? There comes a moment when people who have been dabbling in religion (our search for God) suddenly draw back. Supposing we really found him? We never meant it to come to that! Worse still, supposing he had found us! So it is a sort of Rubicon One goes across; or not

That is what we see next in v 38 It was Jesus who took the initiative with these two for he opened the conversation, and asked them a leading question, so that they had to describe their inner thought and feelings. "*What do you want? What are you looking for?*"

It's a good question that we might put to ourselves each Sunday when we come to church. What do you want? What are you looking for? What do you expect to receive before you leave? What is missing from your life that has started this search? What will fulfil you rather than drain you?

Some look for stimulus, some for comfort. Some for answers to questions they face. Not many come to Jesus first for the deepest reason. It may be mere curiosity as in the case of these two disciples. The two disciples were not prepared to disclose what their hearts sought.

"We can't answer that at once. Give us time. We just want to know your address. Where do you live? Where are you staying?"

We are not ready to follow but we are willing to take a few small steps, and at least follow a little way. As they size up Jesus, however they find he is also sizing them up, and his insight is complete and profound. He accepted their need, as it were, to belong before they could believe. In research about how people come to faith on average it showed that it took four years for a person from first contact with the Christian church to come to their own living faith.

Jesus didn't give them an address, a street and a house number. He said "Come and see" and of course that is what they really wanted. "We just want to come and see." Jesus said "Come-let's travel together." He didn't answer their question, but he is in effect saying "I know that you want to know the person rather than the place, so come home with me" My home and my life is open to you. Come and see and share; get to know me, spend the rest of the day with me- and they did.

Some people see that Christians have something they haven't got and they want it. Then

they find that it is not an “it” but a “He.” Sooner or later Jesus wants to be the Lamb of God for us who takes away the sins of the world and our sin, but he is content to start where we are, wherever that means we end up. So he responds positively to their curiosity. “Come my home is open so spend time with me I’ve nothing to hide” The secret of the open house was that was willing to be open himself.

Their title at this stage for Jesus was “teacher” “Rabbi,” flattering for others, inadequate for him, but they were on the move. Their question began a quest, that led to them sharing their lives with him, and ended up with them calling Jesus something far more than teacher.

It was such a memorable day that years later times were imprinted on John’s mind. It was 4pm when their time with him ended but their work for him had only just begun.

Now one of this first pair was Andrew. the other is not named but is assumed by most to be John. His immediate and instinctive reaction, after spending the day with Jesus, was that he had to go and find somebody else and share what he had found and what had happened.

It is one of the true marks of those who have found Jesus that you have to tell someone else.

You can’t keep that discovery to yourself. “Only a fool goes on looking for something they have already found.” How long does it take to make a missionary? About an hour or two with Jesus! Never let anyone tell you, you can’t bear witness because you don’t know all the answers or you haven’t studied theology!

Andrew could have said “I don’t know the answer to your questions I could find out- but I am sure that I have found the person that I am looking for –Jesus.” So he told his brother “We have found the Messiah” in so saying he made it clear that he was looking for something or someone who would be the fulfilment of the promises, the focus of their dreams the realisation of their hopes.

Now Andrew did have an advantage over us in that Simon, his brother, was already seeking It is lovely to tell somebody who is seeking that we’ve found. That is not the climate in UK although there are people on a new spiritual quest. Sadly the last direction they are tempted to look is often towards the church.

People will always be looking for answers and like John the Baptist we need to point to Jesus and say “Follow him.” Sometimes you can feel like a boy scout doing a good deed that people don’t really want. We need to pray for hunger in the hearts of people but then be ready to share what we have discovered.

Archbishop Temple. “The greatest service one person can render to another is to bring them to Jesus.” And so, through Andrew, Simon met Jesus John records simply “Andrew brought Simon to Jesus.” The journey from Simon to Peter, the Reed to the Rock had begun.

If Andrew had not told Peter, then what a loss to the church! Has our congregation lost out on people God intended to have key roles because we have never told them about Jesus!

His testimony was enough and Simon went with Andrew to meet Peter Jesus exhibited sight - he looked Simon over insight – you really are a Simon; foresight- you are going to be a rock; and oversight – I will rename you Peter

Simon mean a “reed” easily blown by the wind, liable to bend, unreliable. you will be Peter- a rock- steady, dependable. Jesus can change your temperament You may be impetuous, impulsive, unreliable, unstable but by grace you will become a rock and Simon did. The reed can become a rock though he was still Simon, not a machine not a robot not brainwashed

He was changed and became more himself than he had ever been before. Time passed. Peter, as he was now called and Andrew and James (if he were there) and John returned to Galilee and to their fishing. But something had happened. The roots had been loosened. They had a sense of something stirring in the air. They devoured all the rumours and stories connected with Jesus. Their life as it was became more monochrome when they longed for colour

Instead of the daily task of survival they wanted to live and they wanted to spend more time with Jesus

Is there any surprise then that when the call came when they were wanted, invited their responses was immediate wholehearted and decisive? Their response was marked by both obedience and faith and because of them we are here today. Still Jesus invites us to come and see to sit and listen to his teaching to hear the story of his life and death and resurrection and still his call comes "Follow me"

We are living in a time of change in our country and in our church . Alongside all the changes we need to make our own response for it to be of any more value than a rearranging of the deckchairs on the Titanic. Personal discipleship and congregational renewal must accompany and drive the changes if we are to make an impact on the world. But it begins with our tuning in hearing his voice among the many others and making our response.

Davie Kendal the new Chief Officer at 121 quotes the following poem, attributed to a 12th century monk, which gives us a helpful insight as to where we could start.

"When I was a young man,
I wanted to change the world.
I found it was difficult to change the world,
so I tried to change my nation.
When I found I couldn't change the nation,
I began to focus on my town.
I couldn't change the town
and when older, I tried to change my family.
Now, as an old man, I realise the only thing
I can change is myself,
and suddenly I realise that if long ago
I had changed myself,
I could have made an impact on my family.
My family and I could have made an impact on our town.
Their impact could have changed the nation
and I could indeed have changed the world."

Jesus said "Follow me." there were no terms no conditions, no blueprint, no map. It will play out differently with every person, but what remains constant is that he is there.

There is a story from the 16th Century of Sir Francis Drake planning an expedition. He gathered a group of sailors together and told them that if they came with him, they would see some of the most marvellous sights that they could ever imagine, exotic fruit, foreign peoples, amazing landscapes and priceless treasures.

All of this could be theirs if they signed up for the trip. Yet no one signed on the dotted line.

The next day Drake tried again. This time he spoke of how they would encounter storms that might terrify them, winds that would blow them off course and waves that would threaten to drown them. Danger would be their constant companion. He concluded by declaring that if they could handle these things, the joys of exploration would exceed their wildest dreams. The response was that everyone signed up.

The response was not because the two groups were different. It all related to the format of the message. The first time he spoke of rewards and the second time he spoke of challenges. In one, he offered comfort and in the other he promised suffering. In the first, he tempted them with physical things, and in the second he offered them an experience unlike any other.

It appears that Drake discovered what Jesus knew about human nature – that for us to follow him in the adventure of faith that path must shape us, build our character and change the way we view the world.

People want more out of life than even happiness. People want to be part of an adventure. People want to be part of a project greater than their lives. Following Jesus can still provide that today

There's a whole world out there, a new language to learn fresh perspectives to discover new challenges to address. But he who calls you leads the way and that in the end is all we need.

Jesus said "Follow me?" How will you respond? How will we as a Church respond? May God give us grace to follow him.