

Jesus calls us as we are, to be who we are and being who we are meant to be

Readings: [1 Corinthians 1:10-18](#) & [Matthew 4:12-23](#)

Our gospel reading encourages us to explore the disciples', and our own, **call** to follow Jesus. So, I thought it might be helpful to recount my own faith journey and calling as an Anglican Priest. As a young child I went with my Nana to a joint Anglican and Presbyterian Church in rural mid-Canterbury, however, by the age of 10 I stopped attending church. During my first year of law school I reconnected with several school friends. As Christians they **repeatedly** invited me to church. Honestly, they seemed a bit weird, so I **repeatedly** declined their offer. However, during my second year of law, we began to explore the issues of justice and whether there was a higher God-given law beyond our courts and statutes. This prompted me to re-consider my thinking about issues of faith. During Easter of that year, I returned to church. However, I found church's practices and teaching quite confusing. So, I only occasionally attended church during the following 5 years.

Then during my first year in a law firm in Tauranga, I met the world's most beautiful woman, she changed my life forever. Robyn came from a more faith-filled family and, so, my journey back into a relationship with God began in earnest. About two years later in a youth camp in Western Australia I accepted Jesus' call to follow him.

Over the subsequent years, Robyn and I became more involved in a range of churches including Anglican, Baptist and Apostolic Churches. During this time, I felt God's call into a ministry of reconciliation – "reconciling people to people and people to God". Initially this involved employment and community mediations and then international and inter-faith peace-building and chaplaincy work with World Vision. This second role took me to such tourist destinations as East Timor, Chechnya, Afghanistan and South Sudan.

Then in a hotel in Cyprus about 10 years ago, I felt God's call to embrace the second part of his call – to reconcile people to God. This call began as a dream where I sat by the fire near the Jordan River waiting to cross into the Promised Land. God told me to extinguish the fire and head across the river. I followed the ark of the covenant; as it reached the Jordan River, the river stopped and we crossed over. After weeks of the same dream, I decided God must be trying to tell me something (**I'm quick that way**).

I felt God was telling me it's time to reduce my role with World Vision and start my role as pastor or priest.

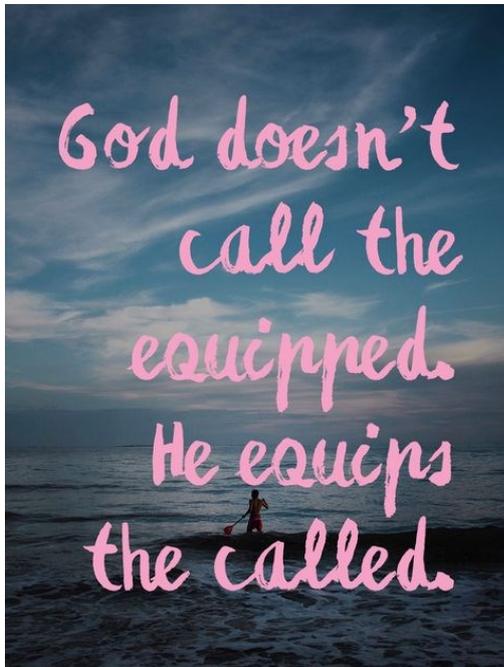
So, I spoke to my AOG pastor about my call to ministry. He advised me to pray and fast for a month. Within a few days, it was evident God's call to ministry involved a return to **'the church of my youth'** – the Anglican church. Initially I believed God had made a mistake – big fingers; small keys. He meant AOG not ANG - Anglican. But it became clear that my call was to the Anglican church – despite my best efforts to change God's mind. I can still vividly remember standing in front of the Redland's AOG. I mentioned that Pastor George and I had been speaking about my call to ministry when I felt what I can only describe as a punch in my heart. God reminded me "but you know it's not here". So, I approached the person in charge of ordination in Brisbane diocese, firmly expecting him to laugh at me and send me home. Surprisingly, John invited me to join the discernment process and the rest is history.

At times, it's been a tough road **AND** it's been incredibly rewarding. There have been many high points **AND** some major challenges. To be honest, I'm not 100% certain I would have taken the first steps if I had known in vivid detail what this call would mean for me and my family. However, I can equally see God's presence and abundant blessings including my appointment here at Richmond. Importantly, I've never known, in any other work context, the sense of joy, peace and hope that comes from sharing the good news with others **AND** I get paid to do it.

In some ways, my life demonstrates our theme for today: **Jesus calls us as and where we are, to be who we are meant to be**. As we re-focus on the gospel, notice where Jesus starts his ministry. He doesn't start in the political, social, and economic centres of Tiberias or Sepphoris. He begins his ministry in the rural areas. So, as Jesus walks beside the Sea of Galilee, the soon-to-be-disciples are engaged in their everyday jobs: earning a living for themselves and their families by **fishing**. The early church historian, Athenaeus, described first-century fishermen as occupying the lowest levels of the socio-economic ladder; their work was dirty and physically challenging. Yet, Jesus doesn't seem bothered by their social status, their grimy fingernails, or their wet and dirty clothing; Jesus, **the king of kings**, doesn't demand that they take a shower before following him. Consequently, Jesus begins his ministry among the ruled and not the rulers, with the powerless and exploited and not the powerful. So, it's the vulnerable and poor who encountered God's Kingdom first.

What does this tell us about who God calls?

Secondly, in Jesus' time, rabbis would normally be approached by prospective disciples and be asked for permission to study with them. Those disciples followed their master around, imitating his teaching in the



hope that someday they would become a master with their own followers. In Jesus' case, we see a new pattern. It's Jesus who takes the initiative and invites these less-than-ideal disciples to follow him. Notice Jesus doesn't ask about their qualifications, experience or abilities. God doesn't **always** call those who already possess the talents and experience they need to do what he's calling them to do; this is because **if you can do everything in your own strength, why we need faith?** So, **God doesn't call the equipped; he equips the called.**

His Spirit empowers us to do things that are beyond our own strength and ability.

In addition, we rarely know all the details, and the implications, of our decision. Notice that James and John, receive no hints about what follows, and no promises of success. In fact, if we knew everything God was calling was us to perform; we probably wouldn't step out in the first place. Do you really think the disciples would have started this journey if they knew they'd end up at the foot of the cross? For every follower of Jesus **including us**; the meaning of our choice to follow Jesus will only unfold over time.

Thirdly, occasionally, God's call will disrupt our family life. One of my dearest colleagues in World Vision was Sebhat from Eritrea in North Africa. He could never return home because his family would kill him; he had converted to Christianity. To signify his decision he had permanently recorded his faith by changing his tribal name to Halleyesus – Hail Jesus. But this level of disruption isn't universal. Peter and Andrew don't cease to be brothers; they're called to be brothers who do God's will. James and John don't cease being sons; they're not only the children of Zebedee, they're also children of God. In each case, all that is asked of the disciples, at this point, is simply that they follow: **as they are, from where they are, and being who they are.**

But Jesus doesn't leave us there. While our past relationships and roles are not destroyed; they are transformed by following Jesus. This is because discipleship means going wherever **JESUS** leads. We leave aspects of our old world behind and step-out in faith; expecting to encounter God and believing that Jesus will radically transform our lives. So, with Simon and Andrew, Jesus expands their skills: these men who cast nets for fish will one day fish for people. Importantly this isn't a short-term commitment. Each of us is called into a life-long relationship as an integral part of God's kingdom. We remain as disciples of our master and we're called to follow **only** him.

So does Jesus' call apply to us? Jesus continues to call others to join him in his mission to bring God's hope and peace to the world. However, when we read the gospel, or hear other's testimonies, we might feel challenged – "I'm not sure this is meant for me, I couldn't leave everyone and everything to follow Jesus". So, we conclude that the disciples or others in ministry are extra-ordinary, Christian super-heroes that we can admire but not identify with. So while surveys of graduates from theological colleges, not surprisingly, report that almost all ministers felt God's call on their lives, most members of their congregations stated they **didn't** feel called. Most believers don't see what they do outside of the church is worthy of God's attention and interest. They felt their secular work or roles were distinct from the spiritual parts of their lives. This means we create distinct boxes into which our lives fit – with separate community, work, family, and spiritual compartments.

However, our secular roles and community positions are valuable – we must not underestimate the highly relational nature of our call to follow Jesus. One phrase in today's Gospel stands out: "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Not make you "ambassadors of God's kingdom", "disciples of the Messiah" or even "the first Christians". Jesus was calling these first disciples into a relationship - with himself, with each other, and with those people they will meet throughout their lives. What matters most therefore is the **relationships** that we develop with people in our workplaces, communities and family.

Jesus is equally calling **you** to fish for people. God has appointed **you** to care for those who God entrusts into your care - **our families, neighbours and the people around us** especially those in need. While sometimes our call will take us far from home, on most occasions Jesus' invitation doesn't necessarily mean leaving behind our families, homes or professions – whether it's our role as teachers or plumbers, shop

attendants or doctors; as neighbours, care-givers or volunteers, we're called to reach **OUR** worlds with the good news of Christ. I will struggle to reach non-Christian builders, police-officers or real-estate agents or those in **your** neighbourhoods and communities, those in your schools or rest-homes as efficiently as someone who's living or working in these settings. Each one of us is in a privileged place that is unique to us as we follow Jesus in our daily lives. We don't have to abandon our work or community, or our families, to follow Christ but our lives in that context have been transformed and they will transform others.

So remember God is **already at work in you**. He **has been** using you to care for those around you for some time. He does this by drawing us into deeper Christ-shaped relationships with those that God has entrusted into our hands. Equally, as churches, we're called to be **both** a gathering-place for those who already proclaim the good news **and** a haven for those who depararely seek welcome, belonging, healing and grace. This church, Richmond parish, must be a place where people encounter the transformational power of God and know the person, presence and grace of Jesus Christ.

So, remember your own faith journeys. **How many of us are here because someone who we admired took time to explore or live-out the gospel in a way that prompted us to explore the issues of faith?** Where would I be if it wasn't for my Nana faithfully taking me to church and praying for me? How can **we be that person for others?** We're all called to be in genuine and real relationships: bearing each other's burdens, caring for each other and upholding others through thick and thin. We always respond with the hope and promise of God's abundant grace. Importantly, our call isn't about being extra-ordinary; it's about ordinary people in relationship with others and reaching out to other ordinary people and, through Jesus, seeing extraordinary things happen. **Jesus calls us as and where we are, to be who we are meant to be.**

Let's pray. Father we thank you for those people, who have influenced our faith journeys. Thank you for your call to us to follow you. Help us to imitate the faith and influence of others and be a light for those entrusted to our care in our work, community and family. In Jesus name amen.