

## Third Sunday of the Year

As I mentioned last week, this week we hear the well-known account of the calling of the first four disciples by the Sea of Galilee (Mark 1:14-20) as they leave their fishing nets and boats by the shore and follow Jesus to become 'fishers of men'. We often associate this episode with a call to pray for more vocations to the priesthood and religious life, which of course we must continue to do, and indeed I have previously used this Gospel reading as an opportunity to say something about my own experience of vocation.

However the call to leave other things behind and to follow Jesus isn't just addressed to those who are called to be priests and religious, but it is addressed to all who hear or read this Gospel reading. It begins with a simple summary of Jesus' message: 'The time has come, and the kingdom of God is close at hand. Repent, and believe the Good News' (Mark 1:15). We are all invited to enter into the kingdom of God, to walk more closely with Jesus, and to invite others to do so too. However before we can do so fully we must 'repent', we must leave certain things and ways behind, and entrust ourselves completely to the mercy and goodness of God.

The first and second readings also take up this theme. In the First Reading (Jonah 3:1-5.10) we hear how the people of Nineveh responded to the preaching of Jonah, how they renounced their evil behaviour, and how God showed his mercy to them. Incidentally the book of Jonah is one of the shorter books of the Bible (only four chapters) and is a good guide for a reflection on vocation, describing not only God's call to Jonah, but also Jonah's attempt to flee from that call, and at the end God's consolation for Jonah when Jonah experiences desolation. In the Second Reading Saint Paul tells the Corinthians not to be too engrossed in their present realities as 'the world as we know it is passing away' (1 Corinthians 7:31).

How do we enter into the kingdom of God? What are the things that we need to leave behind? We will all have our own story of being a disciple of Jesus. For some people there will be a significant conversion experience that they can identify, for others being a Christian will be something that they have grown up with and there will be a gradual process of making that identity their own. Whichever is true for us we will also recognise the continual need to repent of our sins, to renew our dependence on the mercy and goodness of God, not least through the sacrament of Reconciliation.

It is also true to say that collectively we are going through a time of challenge. We pray that we and our loved ones may be spared the worst of the pandemic and we pray for those in the NHS and other public services that work hard to protect us. However the longer the current situation lasts, the more difficult it will be to return to things as they were before the pandemic started. When it eventually ends we will be in a new place and many aspects of the world we knew before hand will have passed away. Will it be an opportunity for us to renew our discipleship of Jesus, an opportunity to follow him more closely and to live more completely in the kingdom of God? His call to 'Follow me' is addressed to us today, how do we respond?

For video see: <https://youtu.be/uq9MR7Eg2oI>