

**Reflection**  
**St.Margaret's Uniting Church, Mooroolbark,**  
**21st January 2018**  
**Lay Preacher - Mr Alistair Davidson**

President of Yarra Yarra Presbytery Lay Preachers Association  
& Immediate Past President of VicTas Synod Lay Preachers Association

**CALLING THE DISCIPLES – Mark 4:12-22**

Every gospel has the story of the calling of the first disciples. Mark, as we read today, locates it on the shores of Galilee, Matthew is very similar with the addition of a quote from Isaiah to explain why Jesus went to Capernaum. But there is an interesting extra in Mark is that he explains why Jesus came to Galilee.

Fishing

Let me tell you a bit about the role of fishing in Jesus' time. Josephus (who was a Governor of Galilee for a period) estimates that there were 350 boats plying the waters for fish. Two of the major centres for fishing were Capernaum and Bethsaida (which means Town of Fish). Fish was the staple diet of not only the Jews, but also round the empire. Most of the fishing families had contracts to supply fish to processors, large estate and palaces – and the towns. The fact that Zebedee had hired men meant that he had a large business. But hired help were called in when the family were absent or large orders needed to be filled. Capernaum was not a tiny village. It is estimated that there were 1,000 plus people living there, as well as a Roman garrison – but some historians claim the number was higher. It had the facilities to process the fish for preservation and transportation as cured and pickled or dried and salted, and to make oil. Capernaum was on a trading crossroads and they supplied the local market as well as sending the produce all around the country and the empire.

The characters

Too many commentaries tell us that the first disciples from Galilee were just simple fishermen. However, in a large family business they would be dealing with traders of all sorts and from many nationalities – it has even been suggested that Simon and Andrew may have spoken at least three languages. They had to know the varieties of fish, their commercial value, and how much of each haul would be distributed to the family, hired help, taxes, etc. It is also evident from scripture that the families worked in a cooperative manner. Luke describes the aftermath of a fruitless night of fishing and Jesus told them to put down their nets

in the deep water. And 5:7 tells us ‘**So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them**’. James and John were partners with Simon Peter and Andrew.

Now, last week we heard about **Andrew, Simon** and Nathanael at the time of Jesus’ baptism. Now, Andrew was definitely a disciple of John the Baptist, and Simon probably was as well. So this explains why they reacted so positively to Jesus’ call. Now it is important to realise that disciples did not stay with their Master all the time. And Simon and Andrew would spend part of the year fishing, and part with John the Baptist. So Jesus meets them on the shore of Galilee. So the sons shoot through with Jesus when he says ‘Follow Me’. Was their response a reasoned one or on impulse? Remember Simon and Andrew had already met Jesus and had a glimpse of who he was – but for James and John the story is different. Did they just follow their friends – or like Andrew did they see something else in Jesus.

### Jesus

Now after his baptism Jesus went into the wilderness and then what – we do not know. Some theologians suggest that Jesus was with John until he was imprisoned. And in Galilee Jesus received a message from John the Baptist ‘*Are you the one who is to come, or should we expect someone else?*’. But Jesus had gone to Galilee and was preaching the Kingdom of God before he called the disciples. But hadn’t he called Simon and Andrew at the Jordan. Jesus instructed Andrew but did not call him.

### Zebedee

Then there is Zebedee, father of James and John. Many commentators make a big issue out of what he must have been feeling with his two sons deserting the family business. What must Zebedee have thought as he saw his otherwise perfectly sensible sons, all of a sudden get up and leave their nets and their chores? Interpretation depends of how long Jesus had been preaching in Galilee.

Some commentators have Zebedee worrying about what he will tell their mother.

Many preachers I have heard and books I have read make an issue of the sons leaving their fishing business in the lurch. I don’t think this was an issue. The business would have been used to Simon and Andrew disappearing.

The story of how Jesus assembled the men and women who were to follow Him in life and proclaim the Kingdom after His death, is a moving one. The disciples were drawn from very different regions and social levels. This must have been

because Jesus knew that through diversity in personality and qualities, the work of Heaven could be done on earth.

“repent” and “believe”? Churchgoers have sadly thin perspectives on these two verbs. “Repent” renders the Greek *metanoia*, meaning a “change of mind”; new thinking, an altered perspective, a Copernican revolution of viewpoint, a radically fresh understanding and direction — all picking up on the Old Testament’s verb *shûv*, meaning to make a 180° turn. “Believe” isn’t “give mental assent,” but is a full-bodied, heart-plunged flinging of yourself into this new, changed reality. John the Baptist said “repent” – Jesus said: “repent and believe the Good News”. To talk about the Good News is for another day. There is a big difference in the actual being sorry for the sin and being sorry for the consequences. Being sorry for the consequences means that the person would sin again – i.e. repeat the act but try to avoid the consequences.

### Community

But first, before dazzling the crowds, Jesus forms a community. You might think he’d dazzle, then collect some followers. But he starts with a circle of people to accompany him. The report gives no indication of what he intends for his new recruits – no business plan, no promises, no super plan. Yet our Lord’s challenge to the disciples of so long ago remains there to test us still today – just those two words: “Follow me.” Community matters.

Remember the opening words of our gospel reading today – ‘Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; **repent**, and **believe** in the good news’. Taking over the mission from John the Baptist, Jesus was out there proclaiming the Good News before he called the four men on the shores of Galilee.

The call of God to human beings is a call for total commitment. It is all embracing. Nothing can be left outside it. No provisos. No escape clauses. It is complete obedience. We are either for or against God – remember the phrase in the Revelation’s letter to the Church at Laodecia: <sup>15</sup> ‘I know your works; you are neither cold nor hot. I wish that you were either cold or hot. <sup>16</sup> So, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I am about to spit you out of my mouth.’ What is worse than not knowing God – being lukewarm ! How is your faith temperature?

And so it still the message today. Jesus calls us, and continually reminds us that the Kingdom is near. It hasn't come – it is near - through the presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit.

As we progress into the New Year (with Hot Cross buns already in the supermarkets), let us think again about the way we live our lives. Christ lives, and he is forever calling us – 'Follow me' Have you answered?