

**Ut in Omnia Deum Glorificetur**  
**3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany 2020**  
Is 9:1-4; Ps 27:1,5-13; I Cor 1: 10-18; Mt 4:12-23

Last week in the Gospel, we heard how the crowds who had come to hear John the Baptist's preaching and be baptised, were directed by John to Jesus, "He's the one, not me." This week, we start to hear the story of the start of Jesus' own ministry.

As Fr Craig has pointed out, Matthew is at great pains to show that Jesus fulfils the Hebrew Scriptures, which is one way of showing that Jesus is the expected Jewish Messiah, even though his life and ministry was not what they were expecting of their Messiah.

So today's Gospel reading begins by telling us that Jesus left Nazareth and went to Capernaum by the sea, and we get the reference to Zebulun and Naphtali, which we read in the first lesson from the prophet Isaiah. What's that all about?

Well the Isaiah passage is probably a song written for the coronation of a new king. There is some debate about which king exactly, but it was probably Hezekiah, one of Israel's great kings. So imagine this scenario: the previous Prime Minister and government have done a pretty ordinary job of governing, and in fact, we actually lost some territory to some other powers, Tasmania and Christmas Island, and everybody is reeling from this blow to the country's self-esteem and sense of autonomy and ability to look after itself. That's the kind of scenario that existed when this new king came to the throne. So suddenly there are high expectations, "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light," and this new king might get back the territory we lost under the old king. Zebulun and Naphtali are part of the land that Israel lost in wars, and hadn't managed to regain. So it is symbolic of at least one expectation of the Messiah, that he will bring the Kingdom back to its former glory. And Jesus begins his ministry by coming out of that same country, hence the references.

Jesus also waited until John had been arrested before he began his own work. His work was not a continuation of what the Baptist had been doing. John had prepared the ground for him, but Jesus' ministry was his own, and it was the work of the Father in bringing the Kingdom of God. The light coming into the darkness of Isaiah is Jesus himself coming into his ministry and revealing himself.

Then our Gospel story moves on to the calling of the first disciples. This version is a little different to the calling of Peter we read from John last week, but if we stop thinking of the Gospels as modern historical documents, but rather as theological stories, told to

illustrate the life of Jesus and who He was, as understood by the evangelist, we will start to look for other things from this story.

Jesus walked by the lakeside, we are told, and called first Andrew and Peter, and then James and John. And "Immediately they left their nets ...." And "Immediately they left their boats..." "Follow me", and they left their families and businesses.

Now I have heard it said that they were poor and so didn't have much to lose, but that is simply not the case. These families had a good business going, the fish supply was reliable and there was always a demand for fish, so it was an excellent family business. They weren't wealthy, but they would have been comfortably off. Plus, they left their family. Families are very important in the Middle East, but in this case they were important to the family's earning capacity and wellbeing.

This is a pretty amazing response, and the danger is that we have heard it so often, that we stop hearing the enormity of these men's response. They left everything, and later we get a hint of the cost of that for these men when Jesus taught that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man, and then in response to the disciples question of Who then can be saved, "Jesus looked at them and said, 'For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible.' Then Peter said in reply, 'Look we have left everything and followed you, what then will we have?'" (Mt 19:24-27). You can almost hear the horror in Peter's voice, can't you?

A lot of sermons have been preached about us following as disciples, but there are two halves to this, there is the following, Yes, but also the attraction of the person who draws you to follow. I want to speak for a little about Jesus as the one who draws us to Him.

Bearing in mind that these disciples didn't know the back story that we know, no one had told them about the Annunciation to Mary, the angels appearing to the shepherds, the Magi, ... none of that, so what was it about this man walking along the shore of the lake that drew them to leave everything and follow him? There must have been some quality about Him that drew them, something they couldn't quite put their hands on, OR, they thought perhaps this man was collecting fit men to fight off the Roman oppressors. That idea is not so silly when you think that for most of Jesus' ministry, even right up to the end, the disciples misunderstood the kind of Kingdom Jesus was preaching about, and thought it was a kingdom of this world.

The Greek word for goodness used about God and Jesus in the New Testament, means both good and beautiful. There is a beauty in true goodness, a beauty that can attract people to it. People are never wholly good in the sense that God is, or as Jesus, who was God with skin on, was, but that sort of beauty draws us by its very attractiveness. I suspect that we have all felt something of this attraction, this drawing to Himself of Jesus, otherwise we wouldn't be here this morning. But it can also be SO attractive, that many people have quite literally left everything, and consecrated their lives to him in the Religious Life. In a couple of weeks, all the Anglican religious communities in Australia and New Zealand will be meeting, and I am a representative at that meeting, and there will be a focus at Evensong in the Cathedral on February 13<sup>th</sup>, if you can get along.

I would like to finish by reading from two authors about this text, one old and one new. The first is from a sermon by St Gregory the Great, who was Pope from 590 to 604 CE:

You have heard how, at a single command, Peter and Andrew left their nets and followed our Redeemer. They had not yet seen him work one miracle, or heard any mention of an eternal reward, and yet one word from the Lord was enough to make them forget all their possessions.

But then perhaps someone is saying to himself: How much did these two fishermen give up at the Lord's bidding? They had practically nothing.' ...Those who keep nothing back for themselves give up much. ...Peter and Andrew gave up a great deal because they gave up even the desire to possess anything.<sup>1</sup>

The other quote is from a modern Commentary on Matthew's Gospel.

The call of God through Jesus is sovereign and absolute in its authority; the response of those who are called is to be both immediate and absolute, involving a complete break with old loyalties. The actual shape of this break with the past will undoubtedly vary from individual to individual, but that there must be a fundamental, radical reorientation of a person's priorities is taken for granted. As the first disciples were called and responded, so are Matthew's readers called to respond.<sup>2</sup>

That's us!

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<sup>1</sup> St Gregory the Great, *Homilies on the Gospels*, quoted in Stephen Mark Holmes Ed, *Celebrating Sundays*, (Norwich: Canterbury Press) 56.

<sup>2</sup> Donald Hagnew, *World Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13*, (Columbia: Nelson Reference & Electronic, 1993), 78