

Jesus Calls Us As We Are

21 January, 2018

Reading: Mark 1:14-20

Loving God
You have good news for us,
Help us hear it.
In Jesus name. Amen

One of the many things I'll really enjoy about St Peter's is the way everyone has a sense of ministry. It's a way of thinking that can be very hard to get started in a place but this congregation has it in spades. At Christmas Rosemary and I have traditionally tried to give a little gift or card to acknowledge all those who do something in the life of the parish. It's nice to be acknowledged. This Christmas it just got too hard. Everyone does something! Some churches acknowledge this on their notice boards and bulletins with headings that go something like this:

Minsters: everyone
Priests: Nick, John.

Rugby games have been described as 30 people desperately in need of a rest watched on by 20,000 people desperately in need of some exercise. Some parishes feel like that, but not St Peter's or St Luke's.

Today we hear Mark's account of the calling of some of the very first disciples into ministry. It really encouraged me on two levels. Firstly, Jesus calls them as they are. And secondly, Jesus builds on what they already know. With a wonderful turn of metaphor Jesus says to those first disciples "You have been fishing for fish. Now, with me, you will fish for people." Immediately they understood their task.

Sometimes we think to be called by Jesus, we need the right background. We sometimes make excuses and we put off acting on God's calling. Worst of all, we think ministry is what we do in church forgetting altogether that we are called to be salt and light in the world.

It's interesting the questions people ask me. When we lived in Auckland it was, "Where do you live?" Suburb status was all important. In Wellington it was, "Who do you work for?" In Timaru it was, "Where do you come from and when are you leaving?" Or maybe that was just me they asked that of. In Dunedin it was, "What form of heating do you have?" And in Christchurch, "What school did you go too?"

Jesus calls the unemployed and the overworked, the young and old, the highly educated and those who didn't go to Timaru Boys High School.

Nor is there a hierarchy.

Being a grandma is no less important in the eyes of God than being a bishop. In fact some bishops are grandmas. All can be done to the glory of God.

Jesus wants us to have fulfilling lives and calls us to be the best we can possibly be. This is not because we have to earn God's love but because God, our living parent, wants us to be our best. It's no use looking at others with envious eyes and hearts.

But what does this look like?

Long ago in ancient Japan a tea master was to learn this lesson. This tea master was travelling with his companion and friend, one of the greatest samurai in all Japan. This samurai was greatly honoured for his courage and skill but also for his wisdom and understanding. And deep down the tea master was more than a little jealous.

On a trip to a distant city the samurai was napping. "I know what I'll do," said the tea master to himself, "I'll slip on the samurai armour while he's asleep and go into the city and pounce about. No one will know I'm not my friend and I can enjoy the respect and esteem the people hold him in." So he did just that.

Being careful not to wake the sleeping samurai he carefully put on his armour which included the full face mask and went into the city. The feeling was wonderful. People bowed to him and asked his advice. Even little children did him homage.

Unbeknownst to him however an evil bully samurai was also visiting the city. He had heard of the arrival of the good samurai and quickly went to find him. Seeing the good samurai he hurled insults at him and challenged him to a contest to the death at dawn, as was the custom.

The tea master was horrified. What to do? He knew the cruel samurai to be a master with the sword. He would quickly have him for breakfast. Feeling deep shame the tea master ran back to the sleeping samurai. He woke him and bowing low, he took off the armour and begged the good samurai's forgiveness. The wise and understanding samurai forgave him.

But what am I to do asked the tea master. I must face this challenge and in it I will surely die.

"While I think," said the samurai, "make tea for us please." For those who do not know, a Japanese tea ceremony requires great skill and much preparation, concentration to detail and focused discipline. The ceremony began to calm the nerves of the tea master but the wise samurai was deeply moved by the skill and attention the tea master showed in performing the ceremony.

"Go tomorrow morning," he said, "and meet this cruel samurai. But before you fight, offer to share in tea. This is quite in keeping with custom. It will also be the secret to your success: using your skills and not someone else's.

So the next day the two meet at dawn outside the city. The cruel samurai was dressed in his finest battle armour. It was terrifying to behold. The tea master wore only his simple ceremonial robes, carrying the wise samurai's armour. Immediately he began making tea. This had the effect of calming his nerves.

The cruel samurai laughed at the sight. However, quite quickly he was watching with awe the concentration, the discipline and the attention to detail the tea master put into the ceremony. Soon the cruel samurai himself became frightened, wondering, "If he prepares a simple tea ceremony with such skill and precision, how much greater a swordsman must he be" The cruel samurai, now thoroughly scared, prostrated himself on the ground and removed his

sword. "Take my sword," he said, "for if you fight like you make tea, I have no chance. Surely your reputation is true. You are the finest samurai in all Japan"

The moral of the story is simple, God calls you to be who you are, no one else. You have unique and special calling and in exercising that you will find your destiny.