

I suspect some of you know that for relaxation I like to watch trash crime shows! There is something about them – the way they always catch their killer – and the amusing and ridiculous workplace relationships which somehow captures my imagination. Actually, I was reflecting with a colleague this week that it is slightly alarming the number of clergy I know who retreat into fictional crime drama for relaxation!

One the crime drama's I was watching recently however the characters were talking about how they keep their composure – which led to the most together character (The Navy SEAL, of course) saying the trick to survival and to even the solving of crimes is 'More being, Less Doing'.

I was amused by this because, in fact, this is at one level the heart of the message of faith as well. The way to follow, the way to believe is 'More being, Less Doing'.

So often when we reflect on our call to be followers of Jesus, we focus on what this in turn calls us to do – what gifts does God bestow upon us to complete a particular task or vocation. But actually our call to be followers is a call to **be** a person of Christ, which may impact on our doing – but it should be the being that is the heart of our Christian faith – because in the end we are called to BE children of God.

In Matthew's version of the start of Jesus ministry – individuals are called to BE fishers of people– which we will notice is slightly different to the account we heard from John last week. You may remember that in John's version – Jesus ministry begins with a question – "What are you seeking?"¹ In Mark his ministry begins with a mighty command to silence a demon; and in Luke we hear a quotation from Isaiah to proclaim his anointing for the year of God's favour. And here in Matthew we have a carefully constructed evolution events which proves that Jesus is the Messiah as the disciples are drawn to him to BE his disciples.

Four sub scenes mark the opening of Jesus ministry in Matthew. First the scene is set in Galilee. Herod the tetrarch's silencing of John means Jesus replaces John in Galilee (Matthew 4:12; 14:1-12). Jesus settles in Capernaum. While this doesn't mean much to us now – for Matthew's audience it positions Jesus, at the beginning of his public ministry, as the light or saving presence that shines in the darkness of Rome's imperial domination. Jesus asserts God's light or saving rule in Roman Galilee².

After this placement, then Matthew makes it clear that Jesus is here to proclaim the authority of God's kingdom – in verse 17 "*From that time Jesus began to proclaim, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."* Jesus will spend his entire ministry focusing and refocusing us on the reign and kingdom of God – and all that is possible with in it.

¹ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3114

² http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3138

And it is into this context that Jesus calls followers – followers to leave their current trade and be ‘fishers of people’. Though I doubt that the disciples knew what this meant. But they would have realised that they were being called to be something different and to follow. We will come back to this in a minute.

Finally in this passage from Matthew, the writer confirms the authority of the beginning of Jesus ministry by outlining that Jesus preaches and heals. This is significant. As one writer, Warren Carter put it *“Jesus’ healings are acts that repair imperial damage and enact God’s life-giving empire in restoring people’s lives. They anticipate the completion of God’s working that creates a world, envisioned by Isaiah, in which all people enjoy abundant good food and physical wholeness³”*

We are called to recognise the same healing, the same hope in our lives. In these four sub scenes Jesus does a great deal – but his followers are drawn in – yes to do the same – but in fact they are called in to be! God’s call isn’t simply to *do* something, but rather to *be* something, a child of God. It would seem that in God’s kingdom being makes doing possible.

Maybe that is what made it possible for John to proclaim the coming Messiah and challenge the powers at be, even when it meant his imprisonment? That he knew God had called him to *be* the forerunner? Maybe that is what summoned such an immediate response from Peter and Andrew, James and John that they felt called to *be* more than they had imagined? As I mentioned earlier, they probably had no idea what being “fishers of people” even means at this point in the story, but they do know that Jesus sees something in them, something of value and worth. They have no idea where they will go, or what they will do, but they do know that Jesus is calling them to *be* his disciples, and they trust that the rest will become clear in time.

4

I think this is true also for us. We are called to be the children of God. We are called to recognise what God sees in each of us – the worth, love and giftedness which God sees in our being – even if we don’t understand it at the time. When we recognise what it is that God sees within us – then we can also recognise that we are called to be God’s children – and it is this belief that allows us to do what is required. But always – we must return to our centre and hold onto what it is to BE the children of God.

During the week I had the great privilege to sit with someone who had been through a very difficult ordeal during the last 12 months. Their resilience has been amazing. But as we shared they described an experience they had had while praying recently – that as they had lifted their face in prayer they had had a sense of warmth on their head – like full summer sunlight – and a sense of God’s love surrounding them. In that moment they describe how they felt valued by God, even in the midst of the pain they were still sitting in. It was a lovely description of how we can notice God’s

³ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=3138

⁴ <http://www.davidlose.net/2017/01/epiphany-3-a-being-before-doing/>

being with us at different times in our lives – though we often don't share such experiences with each other.

It reminded me however of the importance of taking time to stop and be in God's presence. To stop and notice God's value of us – in the midst of our human frailty – for more than anything God wants us to be the most we can possibly be.

The disciples Jesus calls here, are like we heard in John's account last week. Ordinary people who will do extraordinary things – and you will remember that we commented that the difference between ordinary and extraordinary – was noticing what is taking place. It is almost as if Jesus invented mindfulness!! (Which is actually the point) The task of disciples is to follow – and this being mindful, being present, watching, learning, following and doing.

At its most basic, discipleship means following Jesus, getting behind him and going wherever he leads. This is the covenant we make with God, or God makes in our baptism – is a covenant which is the promise to be the children of God.

I was struck by this again on Friday listening to Rabbi Lord Jonathon Sax on thought for the day. He talked about the covenantal nature of leadership in elected democracies such as the US or in any democratic constitutional state. That the basis of the promise of leadership in all democracies is to be a leader which embodies the covenant held in the constitutional documents. I was really challenged by his thought on a day when there was much anxiety about what the change of leadership in America might mean. This notion that all who are called to be leaders, and followers, within this type of government commit to be, and live out the covenant. Though like Jesus disciples this might not always be understood.

I think this is a huge challenge for all of us, within the various covenants that we are in. Sadly in the end we have no power over the way others live out their covenant, but we can influence it by the way we live out our own.

This I think is the gift of the season of epiphany – it reminds us our call to discipleship – of the covenant we are called to be part of. We won't always get it right. But we commit to be the children of God. To commit to prayer, study and action which embodies throughout all the world the love of God. It may not be a straight-forward road – but it is a road that we have all been called to travel. Because in the end we are each called to BE a follower of Christ. Amen.