

5th SUNDAY ORDINARY TIME YEAR C HOMILY 2022

Jesus' call & response to leave all

Lk 5.1-11

Is 6.1-8

1Cor 5.1-11

Well, I guess this week it's all about call and response. Luke has it all neatly telescoped here, with Peter, James and John as the package, for first discipleship of Jesus, the other 9 to follow, noting that Jesus has already commenced his own ministry, with approval and affirmation in Capernaum, but eventual hostility and rejection in Nazareth.

There's nothing too magical or mystical about responding to a call, with reflection and determination and a sense of mission. For most of us, seeking a direction in life and maybe a career, it requires discernment, a realization of our talents, strengths and interests, and trying to align these in the choices we make. That includes finding a partner in life, which is a high risk proposition, when you think about it, but wonderful when it works out in the long term. There has to be more than a bit of luck involved, and a lot of hard work in growing together!

Recently, I came across an ABC podcast on Conversations, where Sarah Kenowski was interviewing Andrew Browning, an Australian doctor who spent 17 years in Africa, following graduation, inspired by his Aunty Val, who had worked as a Christian missionary in Ethiopia for many years. From the age of 6, first hearing about Africa at church, he felt a sense of wanting to help in some way. His Christian faith sustained and inspired him to work to heal the many African women suffering from fistula injuries as a result of childbirth, something the Western world had remedied well over a century ago. In many cases, the women afflicted were ostracised by their own families and communities, much like the lepers of Jesus' time.

Andrew tells a moving story about the physical, psychological and emotional healing, and radical transformation of lives, brought about by surgical intervention, as he trained others to help in the healing process. It's a powerful story, detailed in his book *A Doctor in Africa* (I haven't read it yet!) I just thought it a great example of one who responded instinctively to an inner calling, very much influenced by others in the field. He was also lucky enough to find a loving and supportive partner in life, as he pursued his mission, and maintained his underpinning Christian perspective, finding the meaning and purpose he sought in his life, putting his skills at the service of others.

When it comes to today's Gospel of call and response, when we think about it, it certainly would have been a big hit to the local fishing industry as Peter, James and John walked off from work, leaving their boats behind, as the song goes! And a further question might well have been, "What about all those fish?", with the nets now full to breaking point! And let's remember, it's just a metaphor for catching live followers like you and me, as a fish out of water doesn't do too well in the end! Only Luke tells the story at this point. John presents a similar account, but towards the end of his Gospel, post-resurrection. Once again, it is a question of what the call to discipleship is really all about. Luke's emphasis is on detachment from material possessions, with the emphasis on the Kingdom preached by Jesus as the priority in a disciple's life.

Mark has the call of these first apostles earlier than Jesus' visit to Capernaum, and Luke afterwards, so the sequence of events is not so important to them as the meaning of the call and need for response to Jesus' offer of hope and salvation, through his revelation of a God of love, compassion, healing and forgiveness. As we know, he demonstrates this in very practical and personal ways, through his engagement with those he encountered along the way.

There is hope for us all in the way Peter responds to Jesus at first, openly acknowledging his human weakness and sinfulness, and therefore, his unworthiness to be a follower of Jesus, whose words he has obviously responded to in a hopeful way. The initial reluctance is overcome by Jesus' acceptance of him as who he is, yet hoping for improvement along the path of listening and learning about what true discipleship means. Yet, don't we know, Peter's enthusiasm is clear on one hand, while on the other, when the heat is on, he reverts to his old weak human nature.

He doesn't want to hear about the darker side of Jesus' destiny, with the cross on the horizon from the start, and rejection along the way, as in last week's account of his not being accepted by those who knew him in his own home town of Nazareth, even to the point of some wanting to eliminate him then and there. There is the sleepiness, lethargy and natural anxiety in Gethsemane, culminating in Peter's three times denial of even knowing Jesus in the darkness following Jesus' arrest prior to the Passion. So it can be accepted that failure

along the way is part of the deal, given who we are, but hope is never lost as we persevere in life to live the Gospel, driven by faith and determination.

I can think of my path in life, from an initial inkling as a young child that I liked going to Mass with my family, and the mystique of the priest up front sort of appealed, as did the friendliness of the curate when I was at primary school, and he'd talk to us in the schoolyard and give me a kick of the footy after a game at Elsternwick Park, where I was too fearful to get involved in the fray, being a one of the shortest in the class! Meanwhile, he moved on and later married, ending up as a Brighton postman!

Naturally, my sense of faith and mission has matured and changed over the years, through seminary formation, university experience, and then in priestly ministry, with all of the unpredictable events of my life and appointments as challenges to be faced, as well as having much gratitude for the opportunities I have been given to study and work in Canada as a priest, then Broken Bay Diocese as a canon lawyer, lecturer and parish priest, in addition to my various appointments in ministry here in Melbourne over the years. So here I am now in Essendon nearly 44 years on!

The Gospel message of love remains at the heart of it all, as we continue to follow the way of Jesus, responding to his call to hope and perseverance, with all the unpredictable entailed for all of us, however inadequate we might feel at times. Peter in particular, and James and John show us the way to listen, learn and act accordingly.

john hannon

6th February 2022