

# 'Follow me'

Sermon message by the Rev Derek Lightbourne, All Saints' Belmont January 24<sup>th</sup> 2021

Keynote Bible passage: Mark 1.14 – 20

With the numbers of contemporary English translations of Scripture we may well forget that the New Testament was first written in Greek. Translation of Greek words into English isn't always easy as there are words which don't readily have an English equivalent. For example the Greek *koinonia* can be fellowship, or communion, or intimate friendship (The Message). Today's sermon will consider three Greek words and their understanding in English context. They are all from the same verse of the gospel passage as Jesus announces the beginning of his ministry: 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near: repent and believe the good news.' (Mark 1.15). Jesus then proceeds to call the first disciples to fish for people, after noting they are fishermen. In a word especially familiar to Mark's gospel there is a sense of vibrancy as they 'immediately' left their nets and went with Jesus. While there is a sense of immediacy there had been some preparation for this action. John's gospel introduces the fishermen as being disciple followers of John the baptiser. John had been preaching of the coming of one who is greater than himself, 'I have seen and have testified that this is the Son of God.' (John 1.29-34).

- 1) *Kairos* 'the time is fulfilled.' We most often associate time with our watch or cell phone for an accurate chronology. It seems even, but another understanding of time differs. TS Eliot in his poem from Four Quartets writes of the variability of time: 'Time present and time past are both perhaps present in time future, and time future contained in time past.... Time past and time future what might have been and what has been point to one end, which is always present.' Time has an 'elasticity', as for example when we are enjoying something time goes quickly, or if something disliked, or waiting, time can drag. The gospel writers understanding is more like how we understand 'timeliness', as in there being a sense of purpose and fulfilment. Thus, did the priest Simeon understand his being led into the Temple to meet the baby Jesus when his parents brought Jesus in for the ritual presentation. Jesus saw himself coming as 'the time is fulfilled.' We might say the *kairos* has entered the *chronos*. Our experiencing of this *kairos* can be when events happen, or 'meeting's' take place, 'it was meant to be.' Usually they would be unexpected, and to good purpose. We may look back on our Christian journey and see those times that we understand being God's purpose in and for our life. Sometimes they can be as an inner prompting in caring, to make a phone call, or visit, or send a note.
- 2) A second word is *metanoia*, most often translated 'repent'. This generally has associations of having said or done something requiring confession, saying sorry. However this is only an aspect of the meaning of *metanoia*. When John the baptiser was preaching this message he was calling on people to change their lives and turn them around as in a change of direction. (I remember a time going camping up at Aorangi Mt Cook and as we proceeded up towards the camping ground snow began to fall. Then it got sufficiently heavy to lay on the ground. Then heavier, and I was

being guided by the coloured signposts along the sides of the road. It was definitely time to make a decision and turn around and back to where we had started at Tekapo).

The practical action of being baptised by John was a symbol of the change, from a previous lifestyle to a new way of living. It was described (in English) as a 'baptism of repentance.' Hence metanoia is more a decision made to change focus, a change of direction and positive resolve. I'm reminded of the words of the hymn, as one feels for John Newton, priest and poet in 1772 and his change from being a slave trader. 'Amazing grace, (how sweet the sound) that saved a wretch like me.'

- 3) The third word is *euangelow* most often translated as evangelism or good news. Meeting Jesus was a source of rejoicing and indeed 'good news' for the 4 fisherman disciples. Earlier on they had exclaimed, 'We have found the Messiah!' This was a message they wanted to share, and bring others along with them. Admittedly today this has lost some of the excitement and vitality that was present then.

Yet there is a sense of how we live 'the good news'. Thus, to share with others. May I suggest at least four aspects. First it has to do with having *purpose in life*. Remember Jesus' words, 'I have come that you may have abundant life,' and to live life to the full, as we are able. We are guided by scriptural precedent, and especially the teaching of Jesus.

Second, there is *an overall perspective* in how we regard the life we live and the world we live in. We strive in partnership with the Divine for the wellbeing of the planet, of plants and living creatures, for others and ourselves.

Third, we value companionship, *koinonia* expresses friendship, caring for others, valuing family and church community, including sensing a 'spiritual communion'. And to extend this accord with others, for others to share this. 'We are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.'

And fourthly, the value of 'be-ing', with prayer, mindfulness, solace, stillness, 'presence', hearing the still small voice.' Remember those words of the gospel writer, of Jesus, 'he would withdraw to deserted places where he would pray (Luke 5.16). In these time and places we can experience divine presence, through the grace of the lived moment.'

St Paul in writing his letters offered guidance for the followers of Jesus: Thus I conclude with one excerpt that gives an overall perspective. 'As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. Bear with one another, and if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which you indeed were called in one body. And be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.'(Colossians 3.12 – 17)

Hear then Jesus' invitation, 'Come with me'.