



21<sup>st</sup> January 2024 | 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

## Jesus says, "Will you follow me?"

Today we come together to celebrate the 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany and I pray that today's message with the theme '**Follow me**' will encourage us all, as we continue our life's journey, as brothers and sisters in Christ, following Him faithfully, as disciples in the environments we live in.

*Let us pray.*

*Heavenly Father, as we gather together as living stones, part of your Church, we ask the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts, kindling in them the fire of your love.*

*Almighty God, speak to us through your Holy Spirit, and as we walk in the light of your Spirit may we grow in wisdom, always rejoicing in the comfort He brings, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

Both our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading from 1 Corinthians, and the Gospel (Mark 1:14-20), have a common thread running through them, to do with time and the place of the believer within it.

In Mark 1:15, Jesus proclaims: "*The time (kairos) is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.*"

The moment is one of urgency, for God's reign is breaking into human history.

Whilst our 2<sup>nd</sup> reading begins with similar urgency: "*I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time (kairos) has grown short*" (1 Corinthians 7:29). Paul expects the imminent arrival of Christ in his glory, when "*the present form of this world*" passes away (7:31), and that makes all the difference in the world as to how one should live.

The Greek term *Kairos* carries several nuances within the New Testament. Among its most widely used meanings are:

- the word can mean "significant time," or
- "appointed time" (a time determined by God),
- "critical time,"
- Or even some combination of these.

Within our two readings for today, all of these meanings are present. The time is significant, appointed, and critical, whether it is the moment when the reign of God over all things dawns upon the earth, as proclaimed by Jesus, or the moment at the eve of Christ's coming in glory, as proclaimed by Paul.

So back to our Gospel reading, which has a strong focus on discipleship. All the four Gospels start this way, and is the Gospel message that the church teaches. Disciples are called to follow Jesus, and journey with Him to learn His way and His destiny. We must be prepared to share both.

In Mark's Gospel, the author clears the scene for Jesus, by noting that it was not until John the Baptist had been arrested that Jesus begins his public ministry (Mark 1.14). His first words announce that the beginning of his ministry, and marks the entrance of the kingdom of God into the world as Jesus proclaims: *'The Kingdom of God is close at hand'*.

Jesus appears on the scene, alone, proclaiming that the Kingdom is close at hand. However, the very nature of the kingdom demands that others be called to join Jesus. The Messiah, and the kingdom of God which he brings cannot go unheeded. The first sign of the presence of this kingdom is Jesus' association of others with him in his messianic task.

Today's Gospel tells of two vocations, both told in the same way. Jesus is journeying, as he does throughout the Gospel. He is moving on towards a destiny, marked out for him by his Father. Jesus is not the master of his own destiny. There is a sense of urgency as he relentlessly is on the move. But as he journeys on, he takes the initiative in calling followers. Jesus sees and speaks. He asks them to follow, and he promises them: *'I will make you fishers of men.'* We note that the disciples are about their everyday tasks as fishermen; they are casting their nets into the sea, in their boat, mending their nets.

But the summons of Jesus shatters all these external signs of their settled life as successful fishermen. They leave what their peer group would have seen as signs of their success: (1) Their nets, (2) Their boats, (3) Their servants or hired hands and as in (v 20) (4) Their father: To follow Jesus as he journeys in response to the will of his Father.

While last Sunday's Gospel reading showed that the vocation of the first disciples was a mystery to them as they followed a man called *'the Lamb of God'* (see John 1:35), the nature of the Christian response has been well described by our Gospel reading today.

This concise presentation of the vocation of the first disciples in the Gospel of Mark is an excellent 'wrap-up' of the continuing challenge to us in being a disciple of Christ. The first disciples respond wordlessly to the initiative of Jesus, abandon all the absolutes of their human success story, and follow Jesus down his way, not knowing where it will lead them. Hence it was, and it will always be. The story of the disciples in the Gospels, and the story of all disciples over the years who have read the Gospels show that often we falter.

To be a follower of Jesus will cost no less than everything.

As Corinthians encourages us .... *that nothing in this world can compare to the eternal fellowship we have with God and Christ*. Dealing with the world is inevitable and important – we need to deal with it well for the sake of our families, our nation, and ourselves. But we need to maintain an *"eschatological or future reserve,"* knowing that this is not all there is, for we look to the eternal beyond that which is passing away.

Still, we should remain invested in the world and its ongoing concerns. Indeed, those who pray for the kingdom and expect Christ to come in glory are bound to be engaged in the world and its struggles. Knowing the certainty of God's ultimate reign beyond history, we work to align the present and future with it.

As our offertory Hymn affirms, in the final verse we sing:-

Lord, your summons echoes true when you but call my name.

Let me turn and follow you and never be the same.

In your company I'll go, where your love and footsteps show.

Thus I'll move and live and grow in you and you in me.

**Amen**