

## Sermon 22 January 2023 Call to be disciples

### Matthew 4:18-23

Jesus calls Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John to drop what they are doing and become his disciples. There are two points I want to draw our attention to in this short story.

Firstly, it is testament to the magnetism, the charisma of Jesus. These men had full-time jobs; they worked hard for a living, and yet such was the power, the mana of this man that they were prepared to walk away from this and follow Jesus into what was very much an unknown future. It is quite mind-boggling.

Sometimes, I don't think we fully appreciate just what a presence Jesus had. His ability to draw people was nothing short of incredible and there are so many examples of people in their thousands flocking to hear him. The feeding of the five thousand is but one. And he was able to project himself onto these crowds in an extraordinary way. No microphones, projectors and big screens for this man, just the sheer power of his personality.

Then there is the occasion of Jesus in the Temple, overturning the tables, scattering money and animals everywhere. The thing about this story that always impresses me is that not one person lifted a finger to stop him. Why not? I think they were scared of him; they were in awe of him. This one man amongst a host of men, single-handedly laying waste to their business. Let me tell you, this man Jesus was no wimp. On the contrary, he was larger than life, he was a giant of a man, figuratively speaking.

But when you consider what he achieved in just three years of ministry, it is hardly surprising. To have such an impact he could not be some shrinking violet. He was, in fact, a man of such immense character that he was able to dominate people and events in such a way that history was made.

The second point I want to make is that these men Jesus called were ordinary people going about their ordinary jobs. In other words, they were people like you and me. At their time of calling, they didn't have a track record of great leadership and achievement. They were down-to-earth, unpretentious, humble fishermen. Of course, by the time Jesus had finished with them and by the time the curtain was brought down on their lives, they had achieved great things. So there are two messages here for us.

Firstly, we don't have to be budding bishops to receive God's call to serve him. The call is there for every single one of us to join his team, to offer ourselves up for his service.

Secondly, when we answer his call, Jesus can actually achieve all sorts of things with our humble help. And let's be clear about this, it is Jesus achieving this, not us. All credit to him. The point is, in Jesus' hands we can surprise ourselves with what we might achieve.

Having said that, I think it is so very important that we understand that by doing our little bit, we can be worthy disciples. We might not possess extraordinary gifts or even assets, but there is always something we can do. Let me share a story with you.

I read about a journalist whose name is Dimitri and he lives in Russia. He was attending a conference for Christian reporters and he told this story.

He had befriended a man in a prison in Moscow. The man had lost everything – even his family had deserted him. The conditions in prison were appalling. The man had 44 cellmates in one cell that had only 20 beds. This man had come to a faith in Christ. He was so touched by Dimitri's friendship and care. He

wanted to say thank you in a tangible way but had no possessions in prison. Writing paper was not even permitted.

So Dimitri was flabbergasted when one day this man gave him an elaborate crucifix, that looked as though it had been crafted from the finest porcelain. How did he manage it?

The man had saved a portion of each day's bread ration for more than a month. He used the bread to mould a cross, complete with the body of Christ on it. Then he burned the rubber soles of his shoes to make charcoal for one colour, the dregs of his tea to colour the body of Christ, and precious drops from his stomach ulcer medicine produced vivid green. The result was a stunning work of art.

'For you, my friend,' the jailed man said, handing over the creation. When Dimitri held up the crucifix in the conference, the assembled journalists shook their heads in amazement. Dimitri then challenged everyone, 'What are you doing with the resources at your disposal?'

The point is this, the jailed man made a powerful statement, in this case it was about both his faith and his gratitude, and he did this with virtually nothing at his disposal. The men Jesus called to be his disciples didn't have much at their disposal, and look at the statement they, the impact they made. We are all called to be disciples. We mightn't have much at our disposal but we also can make a difference; we also can make a statement about what we believe, about our faith. And the most powerful statement is made through what we do for others, because that fulfils God's commandment 'to care for our neighbour.'

I finish by reminding you of that story of the man who said to God, 'I want to do great things for you.' God replied, 'That's great. Now, on your way home, you can give a lift to that elderly man sitting across the room from you.' 'Seriously?' the man said. 'Oh yes,' said God, 'and tomorrow you can tidy up the garden of your neighbour who is not very well.' 'But God, I am talking about great things!' God smiled and said, 'Think about it.'

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