

Sermon 18 January 2026 Jesus calls his disciples

1 Peter 4:7-11 Mark 1:14-20

Jesus calls his first disciples, and they are fishermen. This in itself is interesting, but back to that in a second. The first thing to note is that Simon, James and John just dropped everything that they were doing and followed Jesus. That's a huge call. Now it is likely that he wasn't a complete stranger to them. They could have heard him speak and so were aware of the magnetism of this man. But it does speak volumes of the power and charisma of Jesus that these hard men were prepared to abandon their work, their means of providing their livelihood and to commit their future to carrying out ministry on behalf of this man who would have been largely unknown to them.

Yes, Jesus had God's power working through him, but there is no way he could have achieved what he did without being a man of immense character, mana and personality. He undoubtedly has an aura about him that people found impossible to resist.

Now back to the point that these men that Jesus called were fishermen. The first thing to note is that they were, as I said before, hard men. Being a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee was not an easy life. The hours were long, the work was physical and on top of that, you had to deal with the fickle nature of the lake which could see violent storms whip up with very little warning.

Fishing was very much a way of life in that part of the world. The Sea of Galilee is a very, very large lake. It is estimated that up to 300 boats would have been involved in the fishing industry around the time of Jesus. That equates to a huge number of fishermen. So there was nothing extra special about these men.

It is interesting that Jesus chose men to help him change the world who were not highflying graduates from a prestigious academic institution; they weren't people in positions of power and authority; they didn't come from the religious elite or the aristocracy, they were down to earth men just going about their everyday work. They were very much people like you and me. There is a message there for us.

It is important for us to understand just what Jesus was calling them to do. This was a call to service. This was a call to a very different way of life that they were used to. This would be about people, not fishes. This would be about encouraging and enabling people to see life through a new lens, a lens which focussed on the welfare and wellbeing of all and sundry through the power of caring, nurturing, supporting – the power of love. This would be about creating his church and his kingdom.

In a sense, the kingdom is the end result. It is a state where everyone cares for one another. It is a state where the disadvantaged and the marginalised are nurtured and given better opportunities in their lives. It is a state where the focus is on the wellbeing of others rather than the prosperity of self.

The church is the vehicle by which this is made possible. That, of course, assumes that the church is functioning as it should be, and unfortunately that is not always the case.

Now the important point here is that the church is made up of people, people like you and me. So this call of Jesus is not just to those fishermen, it is to you and me. Those fishermen represent us – ordinary people going about their everyday lives but called to be followers of Christ and to make a contribution to the growth of his church and his kingdom. It does call for a degree of sacrifice and it does call for us to step out of our comfort zone, roll up our sleeves and apply ourselves.

Sometimes the fruits of our work may not be realised for some time. Those disciples started something that many many years later grew into the church we know today. Let me tell you a story.

A traveller came upon a barren hillside in the French Alps. In the middle of it he saw an old man. On his back was a sack of acorns, and in his hand was an iron pipe. The man was punching holes in the ground with the pipe and planting acorns in the holes.

Later the old man told the traveller, 'I've planted over a hundred thousand acorns. Perhaps only a tenth of them will grow.' The man's wife and son had died and this was how he was spending his final years. 'I want to do something useful,' he said.

Twenty-five years later the traveller returned to the same hillside. What he saw amazed him. It was covered with a beautiful forest of oaks three kilometres wide and four kilometres long. It was quite

stunning. Birds were singing, animals were playing. It felt a little like a slice of God's kingdom. And this all came about because one man cared, and he actually rolled up his sleeves and applied himself.

We can be like that old man, sowing our acorns now in order that a slice of God's kingdom can be created here in Flat Bush, or wherever our community may be.

I want to emphasise the point that this call is for absolutely everyone. I quote from our first reading: *'God has given each of you a gift from his great variety of spiritual gifts. Use them well to serve one another.'* 1 Peter 4:10. It is interesting that he then goes on to say, *'Do you have the gift of helping others?'* Now that is a gift that is available to every single one of us. No special talent needed, just a willingness to serve.

I relate a story told by a woman, who a couple of years ago stumbled off the subway in Upper Manhattan, exhausted after a long and very stressful day at work. She stopped at a supermarket to buy some popcorn. A man about three times her size stood in front of her at the checkout paying for a packet of cigarettes. He turned to her and told her that she looked very tired. She smiled uncomfortably and noticeably became more alert, as a young woman does when a strange man starts talking to her at night. The man turned towards the cashier and said that he was paying for her snack as well. The woman politely declined but the man wouldn't take no for an answer. He handed the cashier a few extra dollars and told the woman that he hoped her night would get better, and then he left. She never saw him again.

The woman, on reflecting on what had taken place, said this, 'The world could use a little more kindness. It's so easy to get caught up in your own routine and everyday worries that sometimes we just don't remember to tune into those around us. The man who paid for my popcorn has stuck with me and inspired me to do a little something for others who look like they could use a hand. It feels great to be kind, so it's a win-win situation.' How often have we heard that!

I finish on this note – John Perkins in his book, 'Dream with Me,' writes, *'The coming of God's kingdom included people of every ethnicity, of every generation, of every class.'* I look around and that pretty well sums up this congregation. That fills me with hope and excitement.