

The Call

22 1 17

Almighty God,
whose Son revealed in signs and miracles
the wonder of your saving presence;
renew your people with your heavenly grace,
and in all our weakness
sustain us by your mighty power.

Our text may be found in today's gospel, part of Matthew chapter 4 and verse 19:

'Follow me . . .'

Last week, we heard John's account of how two of John the Baptist's disciples left him to follow Jesus. One was Andrew; the other may well have been John, the beloved disciple, the writer of the fourth Gospel.

Today, we have Matthew's account of how Jesus calls Simon Peter and his brother, Andrew; then James and John, sons of Zebedee, from work on their fishing boats on the shores of the Sea of Galilee to follow him to become **'fishers of men'**, the first four disciples of Jesus.

There are four gospels in our Bible. There are three accounts of Jesus calling the twelve disciples to follow him. The earliest gospel was written by John Mark, the young man who ran away naked from the Garden of Gethsemane on the night of

Jesus' arrest and he is traditionally credited with writing a gospel based on the experience of the Apostle Peter. Matthew is traditionally seen as Levi the tax collector whom Jesus called from his tax booth to follow him. Luke, who is also thought to have written the Acts of the Apostles, was a doctor of medicine, a companion of St Paul on his missionary journeys and Luke may well have personally spoken to the Virgin Mary herself. John is traditionally believed to have been the beloved disciple who rested his head on Jesus' breast at the last supper. Four writers; four views; and, at the time the first disciples came to follow Jesus, it may be that none of them were actually present though perhaps you could argue that John was if he were a disciple of John the Baptist and was the unnamed second disciple with Andrew when John the Baptist pointed Jesus out to the pair of them as 'the Lamb of God'. But Matthew, Mark and Luke could have only heard what had happened then second-hand.

Well, Matthew's gospel which we heard this morning agrees with Mark's earlier account almost word for word. Luke's account is more dramatic: Jesus preaching on the lakeside then telling Peter to cast off and a most amazing catch of fish. John has a completely different take on the matter. But does it matter ?

Well, truth is one thing; memory another; and, over time, what we recall inevitably changes as time and experience colour the past. And we do have four separate but intertwined accounts. If they are different, does it mean they are unreliable ? Oddly enough, I think not. If all the accounts of what is alleged to have taken place are exactly the same in detail, then it suggests that the account has been edited, manufactured - for example, the police accounts of what happened at

Hillsborough. If an account of a car accident, for example, differs according to who saw it and from where they witnessed it, then it is more likely to be based on the essential truth.

And the essential truth of the call of the twelve disciples may differ in detail but what they share is Jesus had a group of followers from among whose number twelve apostles emerged to take the good news of the gospel of Christ out to the world in general.

This morning, in Matthew's account, Jesus speaks first to Peter and Andrew then to James and John and the call is simply to follow me and follow him they did, leaving their old lives behind to make a new beginning, doing what God intends them to do. And don't you love the phrase in the King James Bible - 'Fishers of Men' - so much more resonant for than this modern politically correct, inclusive translation of 'I will make you fish for people.' Yes, it's important that God is calling men and women and children to follow him but Man, mankind and even in this case men used to have an all-inclusive meaning in our common, shared understanding when I was a boy.

So there we have it. We hear how men were called to follow Jesus and we, in turn, are also being called to follow him. But are we listening and are we prepared to answer his call ?

I have spoken in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,
Amen.

Preached at the Eucharist

St Bartholomew's, Dinard

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G: Sermons 35 : The Call

