

September 25th

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Mark 1: 14- 20

"Follow Me"

The story of Jesus calling his disciples - how many of us have heard it or read it before? Most, if not all of us and probably more times that we care to remember. So if you've already given a huge sigh and thought "Here we go again," you can be forgiven, but I make no apology for what I want to share with you today because from time to time, I think we need to be reminded of what it means to follow Jesus.

Whether you are young or old I am sure that each of us will have an understanding of what following Jesus involves....but I firmly believe that ours should not be a blind, unquestioning, slavish following, but a well-thought-out reasoned argument as to what our trust in Jesus means....how it helps us live our lives, gives us strength and meaning and a purpose to carry on.

Of course there is no one right way of doing this.

Our faith journeys take on so many different forms, depending on so many factors we experience as individuals throughout our lives.

We each of us in our own way, can show others that we are following the footsteps of Jesus and there is no doubt that we will each in our own particular style reveal something of the nature of Christ.

In the coming week, just take some time to think through how you have already and how you might still go on to reveal Jesus to others.

As I sat writing this reflection, four words sprang to mind about the way I might review my Christian perspective on life:

SPEAKING: when I speak, what things do I say which might be hurtful and what words do I say that might be helpful?

LISTENING: do I listen enough - really listen hard to what others are saying and to what God is saying to me - "Be still my soul"

ACTIONS: am I doing the right things for the right reason? - we have a notice on one of our church notice boards that says "It is always the right time to do the right thing"

ATTITUDE: what is my attitude, my behaviour, my approach to my family, my friends, to neighbours and those who might belittle my faith....what is my attitude towards justice, wealth, refugees, asylum seekers - towards the care of creation, and those on the margins of society.

To me it is addressing such issues as these that can help us revise our thinking and then our actions..

But clearly we won't all come to the same conclusions to such issues. Born in 1889 Sadhu Sundar Singh was a Christian missionary who said, "I am not worthy to follow the steps of my Lord, but like him I want no home, no possessions. Like him I belong to the road, sharing the suffering of my people, eating with those who will give me shelter and telling all people of the love of God! Throughout his life he travelled the world doing just that. he crossed the Punjab, Kashmir, Afghanistan, Tibet, Bombay, and Palestine and then on to Burma, Malaya, China and Japan. His voyages included the USA, Australia and even here to the UK. He wrote eight books - mostly on spirituality and faith, and unsurprisingly as a result of all his walking, he was known as "The Apostle of the Bleeding Feet".

Now Sundar Singh was something of an exceptional follower of Jesus and I for one could never hope to live up to his calling but when talking about today's Bible reading, Singh commented "The same breath is blown into a flute, cornet or set of bagpipes, but different sounds and music are produced according to the instrument. In the same way. the one spirit of the Lord works in us, his children, but produces different results. God is glorified through them - according to one's temperament and personality"

To my mind Singh talks good sense here... just think for a moment about that reading and then about yourself!

When Jesus asked people to follow him he did not go on to check their credentials... he called them to repent and believe but he didn't check up to see whether they had done so - at least as far as we know! For the most part he simply said : Follow Me!

Some people need a blinding light or a particular Bible reading or an exceptional unexplained experience but there is no Gold Standard that everyone has to reach before they can be called a disciple - a follower of the way. Just look at the varied personalities of those first disciples...

Simon Peter was impulsive, James, son of Zebedee was ambitious, short tempered but deeply committed. His brother John was ambitious too but very judgemental. Andrew was always keen to bring people to Jesus, Philip was very questioning, Matthew was a despised outcast from society because of a somewhat dishonest career, Bartholomew was honest and straightforward as far as we know, Thomas courageous but always had doubts, James, son of Alphaeus and Thaddeus were pretty weak-minded and Simon the zealot as the name suggests was fiercely patriotic. As for Judas Iscariot - I leave you to make your mind up about him!

Whatever their characters, personalities and attitudes, Jesus was able to use them for the bringing in of his kingdom and most of them continued to work for its growth long after Jesus had left them.

To finish my thinking today let us remind ourselves that however uncertain, inadequate or even unworthy we might feel about proclaiming our faith, it is JESUS who has called us - flutes, cornets or even bagpipes - to follow him, and to play out the many different ways of showing his love in our lives. Our world needs good leaders and Jesus is the one from whom I take my lead and having done so, will gladly follow. How about you?

Amen