

# **St. Mary's Sermons**

Date of Sermon: 26<sup>th</sup> January 2020

Matthew 4:12-23 the call of the disciples

One of the things that I enjoyed the most when I was fortunate enough to visit the Holy land was looking at the archaeological discoveries relating to biblical times. As you can imagine there was plenty to see so it is impossible to see everything in just one 3 week visit. Sadly I didn't get the opportunity to see the small fishing boat which has been carbon dated to the exact period of Jesus life that has been found in the Sea of Galilee.

The boat is a vivid reminder of the day to day existence of Jesus disciples and what it cost them to give it all up to follow him. They were in today's language, small business men, working in families, not for huge profits but making enough to earn a reasonable living. Fish were plentiful and there were numerous opportunities to market their catch not just to the locals but to soldiers and pilgrims as well. But it was hard and sometimes dangerous work.

So why did they give it all up to follow a little-known wandering preacher? You could ask exactly the same question to many people today. Why have you given up a promising legal career to become a minister of the church, throwing away a lifetime of high earnings for the insecurity and relative poverty of pastoring a church? Why did this person become a teacher, a health care professional, a missionary? Why have countless Christians down the years in a vast array of different professions given up attractive and often lucrative jobs. The answer can only be because Jesus has called them.

Sometimes, over time, there is a growing awareness that God is calling you. In my own case this happened over a period of years, starting when I was quite young. Sometimes God's call comes suddenly and unexpectedly, as it did that day by the lakeside for two pairs of brothers, Andrew and Peter and James and John. Jesus has a way of getting through to you, wherever, or whatever we are doing; whatever nets we are mending or fish that we are catching somehow

we will be sufficiently aware of his presence and of his gentle but persistent voice calling us to know what we are being asked to do.

At least we will know we are being asked to follow him. We won't necessarily know where it is all going to lead and perhaps that is a good job as we might not be so eager if we did. You'll be catching people now was all that Jesus told Peter and Andrew. Now just what on earth did he mean by that! I'm sure as they pulled their nets up for the last time that they had more questions than they did answers. Did Andrew and Peter have any inkling that both of them would end up being crucified as their master would be? Did James have the slightest idea that within a few years he would be dead, killed on the orders of Herod?

No, they did not! God in his mercy reveals things little by little, when we need to know them and not before. Nor did Peter think that he would end up with a huge church in Rome dedicated to his memory and Andrew did not know that several countries including Scotland would consider him to be their patron Saint. That day as a young itinerant preacher walked by the side of the sea they saw neither the glory nor the pain, they only saw him and that was enough.

But it wasn't just personal magnetism that drew people from hundreds of miles around to seek Jesus out. It was his remarkable healings. In his gospel Matthew gives us many detailed examples of the amazing things that Jesus did, but for now he simply gives us a quick summary. We are so fortunate today to have the National Health Service, and it is easy for us to forget but before the advent of modern medicine, many people lives were blighted by all sorts of illness. There can be no doubt about it Jesus really did have remarkable powers of healing. But Jesus was never simply a healer; vital though that was as part of his ministry. For him the healings were signs of the new thing that God was

doing through him. God's kingdom, God's sovereign, saving rule was being unveiled upon the world. How could that fail to bring healing in its wake? Soon the former fishermen found themselves not placidly working at the family business by the lakeside, but the centre of the bustling crowds. Jesus mission was well and truly launched and they were very much part of it.

What pulls in the crowds today? Entertainment of course: football, rock music, big fireworks displays, Royal weddings, or funerals, not to forget remembrance parades. What would it take, what could and should Jesus followers be doing today that would attract people attention in such a way that they would be so excited that they would stop doing all the things that they were currently involved in to come and discover the new thing that God was doing amongst his people?