

‘The accompanied journey...!’

Matthew 4: 18

I do not know how well travelled each person here this morning might be – but I expect that - *either with your work or for leisure* – many of you would say that you are well travelled... ***in fact*** – ***let’s have a show of hands please if you consider yourself to be well travelled....***

I consider myself to be reasonably well travelled to date: I have seen some amazing sights - ***and I hope I’ll see plenty more!***

Indeed: I am very blessed and privileged to be spending this time with you here:

- North Carolina is stunning – the countryside, the mountains, the greenery;
- I often drive around and think to myself that – *were it not for the different road signs and the fact I am driving on the **WRONG** side of the road* – I really could be in Scotland;
- it’s been a great opportunity to see and explore another part of the world! //

But in all my travels around the world – *and of all the many memorable places and experiences* - one sticks in my mind above all others...

And that experience was witnessing the sun rise over the Sea of Galilee a good number of years ago:

- I got up very early – *I’m always awake very early in the morning* – made my coffee (*I can’t function without my caffeine in the morning!*) and stepped outside my hotel room onto a large patio overlooking the water...

I remember it being a particularly calm morning... and it wasn’t long before the first rays of the sun emerged from the horizon to spread their glow over the water:

- within what seemed like seconds, the sky was ablaze with red and orange, reflecting onto the waves — it was breathtaking and it was stunning! /

Later our group toured the shores of Galilee and watched the fishermen at work:

- we wandered round the ruins of Capernaum and finished with Communion on the seashore!
//

That’s why I love today’s passage from Matthew’s Gospel:

- the verses we read today create one of the most picturesque scenes in Scripture — a lakeside retreat, a walk by the sea, men mending their nets. /

It reminds me of my hometown of Ardrossan – *which is further down the West Coast of Scotland, from Helensburgh* - where, with my brothers and sister or friends, I would spend hours at the harbour watching the fishing boats come and go, breathing in, *always*, the smell of the sea air:

- anyone who has spent time at the seaside will know exactly what I mean... and certainly by the time the Malone Family come back from Helensburgh they will have the smell of the sea air well imprinted in their memory!! //

Oh we do like to be beside the seaside...

And Jesus is no exception! /

He's had short shrift from the powers that be in Nazareth who chucked him out of the synagogue then tried to throw him off a cliff:

- but that's not the reason he heads for the sea... /

For him it really is a case of location, location, location:

- Capernaum is a place of rich pickings for a Messiah in search of disciples;
- and his criteria are simple – he wants people who know what hard work is all about;
- people who work the nets and the fields;
- people who raise families and keep the house;
- people who yearn for better days — *for a little excitement* — and for a sense of meaning;
- ***people*** like Peter and Andrew, James and John! //

In Capernaum:

- the bustling activity of a lakeside industry is *his focus*;
- the rolling hills *his stage*;
- a downtrodden, expectant workforce *his audience*;

- his **place** and **purpose** is at the centre of people's *everyday* experiences! //

What happens sounds so simple:

Jesus comes... Jesus commands... people follow...

Twice Matthew uses the word 'immediately'! //

And the disciples who drop everything and go are held up to us as *models of faith*:

- they put down their work and abandon their families;
- it is a snap decision;
- and snap decisions are risky!! /

And I'm reminded of a wee story...

It is the story of the man driving down the road one day when he sees someone dressed from head to toe in red — on the verge, waving him down...

Thinking the man is in trouble, he stops, rolls down the window and asks how he can help...

The man replies:

*"I'm the red **idiot** of the road, have you got anything to eat?"*

A bit bemused, the driver hands the man a sandwich and drives off...

Moments later he sees another guy all dressed in yellow, gesturing for him to stop...

A bit annoyed, he nonetheless pulls over, rolls down the window and asks what's wrong.

*"I am the yellow **idiot** of the road. Have you got something to drink?"*

The increasingly irritated driver hands the guy a can of juice and speeds off...

To his *utter frustration*, he sees another man at the side of the road, this one dressed in blue and signalling for him to stop...

Now furious, he pulls over, rolls down his window, and yells,

*"Let me guess. You're the **blue** idiot of the road, what the heck do you want?"*

"Your driver's license and registration, please, sir," comes the reply. /

Apologies to any police officers among us!! //

On a more serious note... pick up a copy of any popular magazine and you'll read stories of people regretting a host of bad decisions whether they involve personal relationships, cosmetic surgery or criminal acts...

Speak to any of your friends and ask if they've ever made an instant decision they regret and I'm sure they'll all confess to something. //

For the disciples to leave everything and follow someone they didn't know would have had a **tremendous impact**:

- there would be worried wives, hungry children, unpaid taxes, abandoned boats and nets left to rot...

Snap decisions are risky...

But sometimes the risk pays off:

- those moments when you know it is **right** to trust your instincts – to take that job, to enter – or leave – that relationship, to say Yes, or No! //

The writer G. K. Chesterton may have had such moments in mind when he wrote,

"An adventure is, by its nature, a thing that comes to us. It is a thing that chooses us, not a thing that we choose." /

Perhaps this is why everything happens so fast in this passage. No one can wait for the adventure to begin. That is . . . **almost** no one... /

Each time I read this story, I find myself drawn to another of the characters who appears just before the curtain falls. His name is Zebedee... /

Do you ever wonder why Zebedee **doesn't go** with his sons?

Maybe he isn't invited? But surely *everyone* is invited. If that's true, Zebedee stands out as the one who doesn't respond:

- while four spring to their feet, one hesitates;
- while four drop their nets, one isn't ready to let go;
- while four make a **snap decision** to go, one decides to remain! /

It would be easy to criticise Zebedee for staying put — to make him look bad next to his sons who are the 'poster boys' of Christian enthusiasm...

And it's easy to dismiss Zebedee as the one who fails the test to go and make disciples of all nations:

- but out of all the characters in this story, I think he is the one many of us relate to most...

In his choosing *not* to go, Zebedee still answers the call to follow — and he's an important example to us as we continue our consideration of what it means to share faith the Jesus way:

- because Zebedee recognises that *his* place and purpose is right where he is! //

Zebedee is a successful businessman – the first chapter of Mark tells us he has *hired men* working for him:

- so he is not left alone with the work when his sons go off to follow Jesus;
- And he has *no doubt* heard Jesus preach, **he may even be a believer!** /

We know — *from the Bible* — that his wife Salome is among the women who witness the crucifixion and who care for Jesus' needs in Galilee:

- Zebedee may have even partly funded Jesus' ministry;
- He has no need to drop everything and walk off into the unknown;
- His place and purpose in God's plan are right there in Capernaum, in the security of the known and familiar! /

Zebedee proves we don't need to jump out of the boat and abandon everything to be — and to seek — good and faithful disciples...

His experience shows us that for most of us our job as sharers of Good News begins right **where we are** with the **people around us**:

- people who are dealing with the challenges of the lives **we** live...

Our task as followers of the way – as Disciples of Jesus Christ - is to be at the centre of people's everyday experiences — accompanying them on their daily journey! /

Often it is exactly *where we are* that we are most **needed**:

- and sometimes that's the hardest, riskiest place in which to follow faithfully and to recruit faithful followers. //

So how can we be disciples where we are? /

As we have been doing these past weeks in our summer sermon series, we take our example from Jesus Christ:

- the Jesus who lived among ordinary folk with their daily work and worries;
- who met need where and when it revealed itself;
- who walked alongside folk on their journey;
- who helped people in practical, compassionate ways;
- who demanded nothing but what folk were able to offer;
- who made no judgements on lifestyle but sought only to show a better, kinder, more fulfilled way of living! /

Every time we do any of these — at home, at work, in our churches, in our communities, — *among friends and strangers* — we are in a sense stepping out of the boat...

For to follow Jesus means to follow him into a society where *justice rules* and where **love shapes everything!** //

To follow Jesus means to take up his dream and work for it:

- that's your calling; that's your purpose;
- this church, this community is **your** place! /

Yes, there are things we don't know how — *or are afraid* — to do:

- but as the past weeks have shown us — we need not worry about being *good* or *smart* or *young* or *active* enough;
- the folk Jesus persistently picks to *point to the kingdom* are far from perfect – the outcasts, the strangers, the sick, the weak. //

Remember this:

- we are not alone in risk-taking....

Every time Christ calls, he is taking a risk on us:

- He called the fishermen because of their position and potential as ordinary working folk;
- And he chooses you -- *right here* -- to be his presence, to shape his purpose... in this place;
- For here, amongst you — without doubt —there are rich pickings!

Something to think about!

AMEN