

BIBLE READINGS: Jonah 3:1-5,10 Mark 1:14-20

SERMON

Mark's gospel is the shortest gospel. It is action packed and he uses "immediately" over 40 times and 9 of them are in the first chapter!

Mark takes 3 verses to record the calling of Simon Peter and Andrew and basically says that Jesus was walking along shore of the Sea of Galilee and saw Andrew and Simon fishing and says to them, "Come with me, and I'll have you bringing in people, not fish." They immediately left their nets and followed him.

Being raised on these stories from childhood I've had this longstanding impression of Jesus walking along the shore alone. He comes across these two fishermen who are just going about their daily routine. They see this stranger coming towards them. Jesus says to them to "Follow me, and I'll have you bringing in people, not fish." They immediately leave their boats and followed him. It's always awed me that they would respond to someone so quickly and leave their responsibilities behind which never quite seemed responsible to me. It certainly displayed a huge amount of trust. And I've listen to many sermons that have reinforced my perspective.

On the surface that sort of trust appears to be blind trust. Trusting someone that much who you don't know is not always a good idea. If you don't know someone how can you trust him or her?

However we do trust people all the time who we don't know. There are situations where we have no choice but to exercise trust. We do it many times a day. We are exercising trust in mechanics, technicians, health providers, supermarkets, pharmacists, engineers etc that we don't know all the time. In this country we don't think twice about sailing through a green light because it has always worked. It doesn't occur to us to check that the other way is red before we trust it or that the cars will be stopped at the red light. So it depends on our past experience. And there are occasions where the risk is higher. The higher the stakes the greater the risk and the more trust required. Trust is not a simple action - it involves sensation, perception, imagination and memory. And that happens in a flash. Eg the green light. My past sensations, perceptions, imagination and memory give me information whether this will be "good for me or bad for me". Every response and decision we make involves these four aspects and mostly it happens without us giving it a second thought. It happens completely unconsciously and we have no control over the process. We just do it. We either exercise trust or we don't. In this case it would take a long time to get home if we didn't! Not being able to trust comes from past bad experience and fear.

So did Simon Peter and his brother Andrew exercise some superhuman amazing step of faith and trust that day? If this was all they had to go on they were taking a huge foolish gamble because self claimed messiahs were coming and going during this period ending in disappointment and disaster.

We need to look at the other gospels to see if they throw some light on this. Luke has much more information and places "the calling of the disciples" after many other events. These include the healing of many people and particularly Simon Peter's own mother-in-law. Luke goes on to tell us that one night the disciples had fished all night and didn't catch a thing. While they were washing their nets Jesus asks them if he could use their boat to preach to the multitudes. So he's been preaching for long enough to have a big following. When he had finished preaching he dismisses the crowds and sends them back out to fish rather reluctantly. This time they caught so many fish they nearly sank. They were so amazed and overwhelmed at what they had seen and heard and experienced. It was then, at this moment that Luke tells us Jesus says to leave their nets and follow him.

This wasn't blind trust after all. They were first trusting their own personal experience of Jesus. Not just what they had heard from others. It was from this place they were then able to trust Jesus. We could spend hours looking at all the ways their sensation and perspectives had been affected and changed. How their imaginations were fired up with hope and their memories were being healed. All this combined to give them the confidence to take the risk and give up everything and trust themselves to Jesus. Mark's succinctness left out these details.

John's gospel tells us another story which happened right at the very beginning. John the Baptist was standing with 2 of his disciples when Jesus came into view. John cry's out "Look! There he is; God's own sacrificial lamb!"

These 2 disciples turn around, see Jesus and follow him. When Jesus realised he was being followed he turns around and eyeballs them, "What are you looking for?" They reply with another question "Where do you live, Rabbi?" Jesus then says to them "Come and see for yourselves."

"Come and see for yourselves." One of these men was Andrew. And the next day Andrew takes his brother Simon to Jesus. Jesus takes one look at him and says "So you are Simon, the Son of John. Well, from now on you will become known as Peter, which means 'solid rock'." A remarkable encounter with a remarkable person.

You can see now that Mark's brief account of the calling of Simon and Andrew can give the wrong impression. They didn't just jump up and leave their nets and follow a stranger after all. So if you were really impressed with their faith and trust and have felt ashamed at your own lack of faith and trust in the light of this, you can relax a bit. They had had lots of exposure to Jesus. And there are many occasions later on where their trust was sorely tested and they failed. The point is, by then they kept coming back because they knew Jesus. They knew him because they had been with him.

You have to spend some time getting to know Jesus before you can begin to trust him. Trust begins and deepens slowly. Don't beat yourself for not trusting, it is better to acknowledge it and name it. Bring it into the light and show yourself some compassion. If you aren't spending time with Jesus you won't be able to trust. There are so many obstacles to trust and you need to name them and tell Jesus. He will be the first one to comfort you.

It will be all our experiences up til now which affect our ability to trust. They are what inform us, whether something will be "good for me or bad for me". We use our senses, our perceptions, our imaginations and memories before we make a decision to act in trust. 8 times out of 10 it will happen in a flash and we won't even think about it. It will be unconscious. Only reflection and quietness can allow the unconscious to become conscious. If we don't spend time reflecting and praying it will remain locked away. This means we won't even have a choice and we will be controlled by our past. When we are controlled by our past we will try and control our present and everyone else around us. It is the opposite of freedom and trust.

Jesus turns around asks, "What are you looking for....Come and see for yourselves."

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