

COME WITH ME

Matthew 4:18-23 [MW20-04]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 26 January 2020

“Come with me”

- there are maybe 101 pretty reasonable excuses for not taking up this invitation and just one very good reason *to* do it:
Jesus is the one who is making it

There was nothing wrong with what Simon and Andrew and James and John were doing

- they were fishermen
it was not glamorous, but it was an honest trade
- you could respect people like this
who worked hard, did their best and operated fairly
- however the appearance of Jesus on the shore of Lake Galilee
was the start of something new and different and ...

Listen to how it reads in *Bits of The Kiwi Bible*, as told by Chris Grantham

Now, John had been interrupted by the local cops, who'd locked him up. So Jesus decided it was his time to hit the road. 'Hey you guys,' he said. 'There's something up. God rules, OK? The times they are a-changing, and you'd better believe it's time you changed your lives around too.'

Jesus tramped along the Galilee waterfront and saw Simon and Andrew doing a spot of fishing to pay the mortgage. 'Join me,' he said. 'And let's work together at catching a lot better stuff than that.'

'Sounds like a good deal, we're in!' they replied.

So the three of them walked on, and what do you know, there were their mates the Zebedee boys – James and John – also getting ready for a fish. 'Join us!' Jesus called. And would you believe it, they did. Out of the boat, on the road, leaving their old man Zeb and the rest of the crew gobsmacked.

I really like that final line:

- “leaving their old man Zeb and the rest of the crew gobsmacked”
let's take that up
- “gobsmacked” is not exactly a theological term
but it seems to me it's just the right word
- so let's overhear a conversation between the Zebedee boys, James and John

James: C'mon. Let's go!

John: You what? You can't just drop everything and go ...

James: Why not? You heard what he said: “Come with me.”

John: Yes. But. But – what about Dad? Who's going to look after him? What's Mum going to say? Then there are all the others. We can't just leave them in the lurch.

James: They'll be fine. It's not as if there aren't other able bodied blokes around. Besides, he asked us – you and me. He asked us to go with him.

John: And that's it? Just drop everything and go. Just like that. What about that girl you're sweet on? How's she going to take it when she finds out you just up and left?

James: I guess that's not as important as this.

John: Really. You haven't thought this through at all. We don't even have a change of clothes. No money. What are we going to do?

James: Like I said. All that stuff's not important. Going with Jesus is. So let's go before he changes his mind.

John: And do you get what he said about, “I will teach you how to bring in people instead of fish”?

James: Of course I don't! I'm just a simple fisherman like you. But it sounds different. Exciting. Something to put your life to. I'm keen to give it a shot.

John: Yes, but you always were the impetuous one. What if it doesn't work out? What if we end up starving, with nowhere to sleep?

James: We can always come back to fishing. But somehow I don't think it's going to work out like that.

John looks around at the lake he has grown up on the shores of, and that he loved. He looks at the boat and the nets they have put so much time into; the other fishermen, friends and workmates; their father, a firm but fair man looking up with wondering eyes. Then John looks at Jesus, with Simon and Andrew beside him; smiling, waiting, beckoning.

John: Oh what the heck! It can't be any worse than fishing ...

He claps James on the back: Ok let's go bro! [“James and John Respond” ©Wayne M. Thornton, 2019]

I'm thinking that most of us who are here this morning

- have already responded to Jesus' invitation: “come with me” that's how you got here
- and hymn singing, communion, Bible reading, prayers, maybe even sermons help you to make sense of what that invitation is all about

I also think that Jesus is not asking us to drop everything

- and head off to the deepest, darkest unknown place to share the Good News it could be, I'll not rule it out, but that particular call is not for everyone
- there were others on the shore of Lake Galilee who did not drop everything

However that doesn't let us off the hook - a fishing metaphor, get it, off the hook

- we have this gospel reading set down near the beginning of the year because it asks us to stop, listen, reflect and then go on as a follower of Jesus
- it may indeed mean a change of direction something specific we are being asked to take up or to stop doing something or to leave something or even someone behind
- there is something we each need to do

To help us consider this

- here are some words from one of my favourite writers, Max Lucado he is writing about Joseph, the husband of Mary
- however these words have wider implications for responding to Jesus' invitation just three simple words: “come with me” or another three words: “go my way”

Joseph was perched firmly on his branch in the tree. It was thick, reliable, and perfect for sitting. It was so strong that he didn't tremble when the storms came, nor did he shake when the winds blew. No, this branch was predictable and solid and Joseph had no intention of leaving it. That is, until he was told to go out on a limb.

Common sense told him not to go out on the limb. But God had told him to do it. And that's what bothered him. It bothered him because he was happy where he was. Surely God wouldn't want him to leave ...

Besides, he knew the kind of fellow who goes out on a limb. Radical. Extremist. Liberal. Always going overboard. Always stirring the leaves. Guys with their heads full of strange ideas in search of foreign fruit. Why, the stable ones are the ones who know how to stay close to home and leave well enough alone.

I have a feeling some of you can relate to Joseph. You know how he feels, don't you? You've been there. You're smiling because you, too, have been called to go out on a limb a time or two. You know the imbalance that comes from having one foot in your will and one foot in his. You, too, have sunk your fingernails into the bark to get a better grip. You know too well the butterflies that swarm in the pit of your stomach when you realize changes are in the air.

Perhaps changes are in the air right now. Maybe you're in the midst of a decision. It's disrupting, isn't it? You like your branch. You've grown accustomed to it and it to you. And, like Joseph, you've been a pretty good branch-sitter. And then you hear the call. "I need you to go out on the limb and

take a stand. Some of the local churches are organizing an anti-pornography campaign. They need some volunteers."

move. Take your family and move overseas. I have a special work for you."

forgive. It doesn't matter who hurt who first. What matters is that you go and build the bridge."

evangelize. That new family down the block? They don't know anyone in town. Go meet them."

sacrifice. The orphanage has a mortgage payment due this month. They can't meet it. Remember the bonus you received last week?"

Regardless of the nature of the call, the consequences are the same: civil war. Though your heart may say yes, your feet say no. Excuses blow as numerous as golden leaves in an autumn wind. "That's not my talent." "It's time for someone else to take charge." "Not now. I'll get to it tomorrow."

But eventually you're left staring at a bare tree and a hard choice: His will or yours?

Joseph chose his. After all, it was really the only option. Joseph knew that the only thing worse than a venture into the unknown was the thought of denying his Master. So, resolute, he grasped the smaller limb. With tight lips and a determined glint in his eye, he placed one hand in front of the other until he dangled in the air with only his faith in God as a safety net.

As things turned out, Joseph's fears were justified. Life wasn't as comfortable as it had been. The limb he grasped was, indeed, a slender one: The Messiah was to be born to Mary and to be raised in his home. He took cold showers for nine months so the baby could be born of a virgin. He had to push away the sheep and clear out the cow patties so his wife would have a place to give birth. He became a fugitive of the law. He spent two years trying to understand Egyptian.

At times that limb must have bounced furiously in the wind. But Joseph just shut his eyes and held on.

But you can be sure of one thing. He never regretted it. Sweet was the reward for his courage. One look in the face of that heavenly toddler and he knew he would do it again in a heartbeat.

Have you been called to go out on a limb for God? You can bet it won't be easy. Limb-climbing has never been easy. Ask Joseph. Or, better yet, ask Jesus.

He knows better than anyone the cost of hanging on a tree.

What will “come with me” or “go my way” mean for your life this year???

- a couple of moments for reflection ...

then I will conclude with a prayer

[time for reflection]

Jesus,

You call us to go with you;

even if the path is difficult to see,

or is heading in a direction we would never have chosen for ourselves.

Forgive us for being so quick to question

and so hesitant to follow.

Help us to see with the eyes of faith.

Teach us to follow without fear,

knowing that You are always with us,

leading the way.

Amen.