



## Follow me

An address for the Cosmic Mass on Ash Wednesday

6<sup>th</sup> February 2008 ● Rev Grace

*Now after John was arrested, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of God, and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel." And passing along by the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and Andrew the brother of Simon casting a net in the sea; for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, "Follow me and I will make you become fishers of men." And immediately they left their nets and followed him. And going on a little farther, he saw James the son of Zeb'edee and John his brother, who were in their boat mending the nets. And immediately he called them; and they left their father Zeb'edee in the boat with the hired servants, and followed him.*

*Mark 1: 14-20*

*When the days drew near for him to be received up, he set his face to go to Jerusalem.*

*As they were going along the road, a man said to him, "I will follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said to him, "Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head." To another he said, "Follow me." But he said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." But he said to him, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God." Another said, "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say farewell to those at my home." Jesus said to him, "No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God."*

*Luke 9: 51, 57-62*

We barely seem to have begun our year – this year designated in our Centre as the year of faith – and already we stand at the Ash Wednesday altar, turning our thoughts towards Holy Week, the cross and the resurrection.

It's as if there's an urgency to this year, that we're being urged by the spiritual worlds to get the preparatory stages of the year over quickly so the real work lying ahead of us all can begin.

And yet, at the same time, my personal experience has been that, until just a few days ago I've been haltered or prevented in some way from moving forward, that I've just had to wait, to wait in faith, for my year to begin. I suspect many of you have already experienced that this year's journey of faith may not be about having a cosy ride!

The year's urgency is reflected in the fact that we will celebrate Easter Sunday this year at almost the earliest possible date – March 23 - while in 2011, it will be at the opposite end of the possible time span, April 24.

The date is worked out from the timing of the first Sunday after the first full moon after the Vernal Equinox. This we always assign to March 21, although in reality the actual date of the equinox changes, too.

This choice of dates was worked out at a church conference in 325 and was designed to bring agreement between those in the church who were split between differing ways of marking the timing of the first Easter.

Some wanted Sunday because Christ's resurrection was on a Sunday, while others wanted it to be at the Full Moon because the day of resurrection was a full moon – the full moon of the Jewish Passover. And Easter Sunday needed to be after the equinox because of the significance of this moment as a still turning point when the sun overshadows the earth, north and south, equally.

Easter and Passover long ago lost their connection date wise, and if anyone's interested, I'm sure there's fertile exploration in the fact Passover is linked to the Hebrew lunar calendar, while our celebration of the Sun spirit on earth is linked to the rhythms of the sun, and also fertile exploration into the importance of the equinox, but that's not for this evening's contemplations.

Let's instead just reflect for a short time on journeying to Easter in faith. It's a journey all of us gathered here are called on to take with Christ in the rhythm of each year and each lifetime. Like him, we are called now to set our faces to Jerusalem, to journey inwards towards the peace and the ever-flowing life of Christ in our heart centres.

Each year we're called on to take this journey more consciously, to use our thinking, our feeling and our will each step of the way. And each year, it seems like the forces of the material world around us make their demands on our time, energy and emotional resources more strongly.

Yet we can't deny the demands of world; in fact, as Rev Antoinette pointed out in her New Year's reflection, faith is connected with action and with no longer waiting but making things happen. This year, in our everyday lives, we will all act and bring things into manifestation. But how to balance the pull of all these worldly forces? And how are we to come into the flow of spirit which enfolds those who truly live in faith?

Perhaps the stories of the calling of the disciples can teach us something. I'd like to add another small reading from Luke to the one from Mark which Alison read to you and to the previous reading from Luke. This is from Mark chapter 2, where the Christ calls the disciple Matthew:

*He went out again beside the sea: and all the crowd gathered about him, and he taught them. And as he passed on, he saw Levi the son of Alphaeus sitting at the tax office, and he said to him, 'Follow me.'*  
Mark 2:13-14

A line from Emil Bock's book, *The Rhythm of the Christian Year*, jumped out at me when I was preparing this address. It said simply: *Faith is the power of courage in the soul.*

Faith is the power of courage in the soul.

Power - because with faith nothing is impossible, as St Paul tells us. Courage - because it implies valour and truth and action through the correct use of thinking and the will. And the soul - because here resides the knowledge of our Christed purpose, love in abundance and the capacity for real sacrifice.

Each disciple called by Christ showed the power of courage in their souls. Simon and Andrew did not hesitate to leave their boats, family and livelihood. They did not hesitate to answer the call and move into the unknown.

Neither did James and John. They left their father Zebedee and followed the Christ. None of them asked for clarification of what they were being called to – of what it actually might mean to become fishers of men – before they decided! No, they acted in pure faith.

Levi, too, left everything and rose and followed Christ when he called. Each of us here no doubt has our own story of being called by the Christ to follow him.

A couple of different Greek words are used to convey this sense of call. In the calling of Simon, Andrew, James and John, the Greek actually means 'come after me'. So there's a sense of walking in his path, *becoming and being like him so they can continue on after him*. With the calling of Levi, the Greek has the more literal sense of 'follow me'.

In either case, Christ expects and receives total trust. The disciples abandon their old lives without hesitation and without looking back and they abandon themselves to Christ – totally.

That doesn't mean that there won't be moments of doubt; these men were human as well as the leaders and servants of the new dispensation. In Mark 10, we find the following:

*Peter began to say to him, 'Lo, we have left everything and followed you.'  
Jesus said, 'Truly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters of mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life ...'  
Mark 10: 28-31*

So, that is the promise when we truly live in and by faith, that our sacrifices for Christ and His work do not go unremarked.

It's interesting when you look at where and when the calling of these first disciples took place. Jesus was just beginning his three year ministry and John the Baptist had been arrested. Jesus entered Galilee, that place of boundless life energy, and continued preaching John's message of repentance: *The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent, and believe in the gospel.*

He no doubt seeks and then finds his first disciples as they go about their daily work in the world: Andrew and Peter fishing, James and John mending their nets in preparation to fish, and Levi in his tax collection office by the lake.

So he calls these disciples out from ordinary moments in their ordinary lives. It doesn't matter whether their work would have been recognised by society as honourable work – fishing – or have had a stigma attached to it, as tax collecting did back then. (Probably still does!)

And they recognise the call, albeit that they are right in the middle of their everyday work.

This is how he calls us too – right in the middle of our everyday lives, whether it is a convenient moment or not. And he asks us to leave that which is old behind, even though, unlike these first disciples, we still probably need that day job!

Jesus finds all five men working beside the lake, which, metaphysically, represents the subconscious where memory is stored. So, when they hear his voice, memory of their own divinity and purpose is re-awakened – and with it faith.

So too with us ...

We move from lake to mountain for the full calling out and appointing of all twelve disciples.

In chapter 3 of Mark we read:

*And he went up on the mountain, and called to him those whom he desired; and they came to him. And he appointed twelve to be with him, and to be sent out to preach and to have authority over demons: Simon whom he surnamed Peter; James the son of Zebedee and John the brother of James, whom he surnamed Boanerges, that is, sons of thunder; Andrew, and Philip, and Bartholomew and Matthew, and Thomas, and James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus, and Simon the Cananaean, and Judas Iscariot, who betrayed him.*

*Mark 3:13-19*

So we find the twelve in amongst the throngs of needy souls who followed Jesus onto the mountain. We are now in a place of elevated consciousness – the mountain – set apart from and no longer going about ordinary, everyday life.

And the call, too, is different. More like a choosing - many are called but few are chosen. On the mountain he called each one; they were the disciples he desired, those he already held in his heart.

They are called not just to follow the Christ, but were chosen to come to him, in the sense of coming and abiding with. Mark is very definite when he spells out: *And they came to him ...* There's a sense there of directing their will and of conscious choice, but a choice made while on the mountain and so in a state of elevated consciousness.

So, our calling may come to us in the midst of our everyday lives, but that's not the end of it – perhaps it's really just the start. To be chosen and to live in the presence of Christ is an ongoing action that needs the consciousness of the mountain as well as the awakened memory levels of the lake.

And for us, who can no longer shut ourselves away from the world as we did for so many centuries as nuns and priests, it also involves the world - the work, the distractions and temptations and the crowds of needy souls.

So this year, as we set our faces to go to Jerusalem with Jesus, can we make it all the way with him to the foot of the cross?

We will meet many temptations and tests as we follow him on this journey from now until Good Friday. What sort of the tests and temptations? Here perhaps Luke gives us some idea in the reading with which I began this address.

Remember the three 'follow me' vignettes? We find these only in Luke, so we know we are dealing the disciplining and transformation of our astral levels.

Firstly, there came a man who offered himself as a follower: *I will follow you wherever you go.* And then Jesus' strange reply: *Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to lay his head.* He doesn't say, 'Don't bother, I haven't recognised you or called you.' With his clairvoyant perception he can see the reality of the man's soul and of his attachment to the physical body and the material world. He can see that the man's thinking is still tied to the world and he is not ready to be set apart, to be in the world but not of the world.

The thinking of the Son of man, in contrast, has nowhere it calls home, so it is creative and free and does not need that which is already known, familiar and comfortable to act as its trigger.

Having set our faces to Jerusalem, can we be free in our thinking like the Son of man? Can we discipline ourselves to rise above the needs of the physical, if we need to? To be in the world, but not of the world?

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And then the second man, whom Jesus *does* call:

*To another he said 'Follow me'. But he said to him, 'Lord, let me first go and bury my father.' But he said to him, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead; but as for you, go and proclaim the kingdom of God.'*  
*Luke 9:59-60*

Here Jesus recognises the soul's readiness to live its purpose, but the pull of the emotions and of group consciousness are always there trying to drag us back. Just finish this, just fulfil that obligation, just respond to this emotional pull. But Jesus' call beckons us to freedom and to the future, not the past. True feeling must replace the pull of the emotions.

And lastly, a second man offering himself, but this time with conditions: *I will follow you, Lord, but let me first say farewell to those at my home.*

And the oft-quoted reply of Jesus: *No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God.*

This is testing on the will level. The will is activated when a decision is made – any decision – and the will is required for action that leads into the new. There can be no looking back to the old.

So here we see where our tests will come as we walk the path we've been called to walk to Jerusalem with Jesus and his disciples. They'll come on our thinking, feeling and willing levels. And they'll test us to deepen our experience and live courageously in faith, every moment – whether by the lake or on the mountain.

I think perhaps this whole year, not just this journey to Jerusalem for Easter, is about surrendering the last vestiges of our fear and ego and handing ourselves over – thinking, feeling and willing – to Christ.

Then perhaps we will enrich our experience that the veil of the temple, the division between the material and the spiritual, has indeed been torn in two.

So shall it be.

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