

Reflection on the gospel for Sunday 7th February 202

By Revd Christina Mason

Mark 1 29-39

Jesus seems to have had an immediate impact when he started his ministry. His charisma had led the first four disciples to leave their boats and follow him. In the synagogue at Capernaum he amazed his hearers by his authority. After he cures Simon's mother-in-law, people flocked to him asking for healing. Mark describes a kind of whirlwind of that first 24 hours of Jesus' public ministry. Then suddenly Jesus disappears, off to pray in a quiet place, much to the puzzlement of his new followers. When they eventually track him down, he simply says "let's go elsewhere so that I can preach there too". For him, it was sufficient to plant a seed or to heal a wound. His invitation to *follow me* is to be part of something new and dynamic, somewhat unstable and uncertain, the opposite of good order; travelling light, not turning back, encountering and quickly moving on.

St Paul understood this dynamic well. It was this Spirit-driven moving on which is described in the epistles and was the foundation of the church at that time. And it was a dramatic and dangerous change of direction and a different life style for the members of the earliest church communities. Persecution, ridicule, loss of family and friends and status, and for some, martyrdom.

Two thousand years later, where are we now? Many of us have struggled with this last year and all the losses and strangeness we have been faced with. The foundations of usual routines, our taken-for-granted normal life patterns have been shaken. Can we learn anything from the start of Jesus' ministry and that of the early church?

The Church of England is the established church, at least in England. Establishment doesn't sound much like being in the midst of a whirlwind of change and movement, does it! Are we happy with what we have become accustomed to? How many of us would like things to change, but are afraid that any alteration will be to the detriment of our faith and practice? Maybe Lent is a time for us to consider again what it means to be a Christian in today's society which many believe is becoming ever more separated from the values which we hold dear, and which is becoming increasingly uninterested in matters of religious faith.

With a great many churches throughout the nation closed, there will be some , for different reasons, which will not be opening again. As the hymn goes we have 40 days and 40 nights to be reflecting on our future as followers of Jesus. What does it mean for us as individuals and as a body of believers? When the churches re-open and services start up again, do we want just the same as before successive lockdowns? Are there changes we would like to make? How can we serve our communities in the different villages that we represent? There is lots to think about and this is an ideal time to reflect during Lent when a lot of activities are closed down.

Amen

Collect: Almighty God,
 you have created the heavens and the earth
 and made us in your own image:
 teach us to discern your hand in all your works
 and your likeness in all your children
 through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord,
 who with you and the Holy Spirit,
 reigns supreme over all things,
 now and for ever.
 Amen