

St Bartholomew's Burnley, Sunday 25th January 2026

Matthew 4.12-25

At the beginning of today's Gospel Jesus, hears of the arrest of John the Baptist and immediately withdraws from Nazareth and makes his home in Capernaum in Galilee, smack bang into Gentile territory. A reminder and a statement that the Kingdom of God is for all of God's creation

The withdrawal is not a retreat or flight from danger but rather strategic by Jesus as he does not confront those who oppose him. If Judea is dangerous, a return to Galilee is called for-but not to Nazareth where he had grown up, but Capernaum, a city by the sea, a larger city mainly Jewish but also in the midst of Gentile territory where it picks up the words of Isaiah, -"where people sit in darkness". This text sets the scene for the ministry of Jesus about to unfold and foreshadows our mission as Christians and the Church.

The light that Jesus shines is the proclamation of the "Kingdom of God". It is a call for the transformation of the world, a call to the principles of justice, healthy relationships, the abolition of sickness and disease and for peace and harmony. The essence of the Kingdom is embracing a new framing story that shapes our humanity individually and in community.

As I have said Galilee is the place where the public ministry of Jesus begins other than for his final days in Jerusalem although

John has Jesus going back and forth between Galilee and Jerusalem.

The major industries at the time in Galilee were farming and fishing setting the scene for the parables of Jesus. There was no social media or journalists as we know them today but the message of the Kingdom was conveyed by word and what can be described as "Oral tradition word of mouth". So while Capernaum served as home base, the Gospels convey that Jesus and his disciples were moving around the country side proclaiming the Kingdom. It is important I suggest that we acknowledge that Jesus had a home base from where he moved out into the community just as the church is called to do today. We are called to be active, have a voice and be seen in the communities of which we are part. Sadly, I feel that our own Diocese has taken a backward step in closing down Anglican media for financial reason, limiting our voice further in the public space of discourse.

It is not surprising that the second part of today's Gospel tells of the calling of the first disciples. He does not call for them to abandon who they were and their livelihood. They are all fishermen, but the account in Matthew summons them to leave their fishing and join him in proclaiming the news of the Kingdom of God. Until now they fished on uncertain waters of the sea of Galilee now they will fish on the turbulent world. The words of Jesus to the new recruits to his mission were grounded in the language, culture and vocation they understood and practised. It raises for us the issue or issues

what metaphors, cultural practices, language and vocation that we could use in our mission as church. This suggest that there is no prepaid package. If we are to be followers and story tellers of God's unending love, we need to recognise the culture, communities, families, and vocations we find ourselves in and use them in ways that embrace the message of the Kingdom of God.

When Jesu calls Peter, Andrew, James and John they respond without hesitation. No questions asked. Parents and families must have been surprised although that maybe simply Matthew's literary intent. We know from later accounts in the Gospels that these same guys doubt, deny and abandon Jesus. They are fallible and fragile as we are so often. They follow Jesus because God makes it possible. We are not called to bully, trap, manipulate or even persuade others to accept Jesus or even join the church. God makes the vison of the Kingdom of God come alive. We are called to embody that vision.

Jesus proclaims the Good new to the first followers. If it was not Good news they would not have responded. What is the Good news we offer?

If it is not Good news to all it is not of God. For people who are caught in despair, poverty, sexism, homophobia, homelessness, racism or exploitation what do you think counts as Good news to them ?

Finally, tomorrow, Australia day is supposed to bind us together as a nation yet increasingly exposes its fractures and injustices.

It is a day of mixed emotions and hope. For many in the community it is called Invasion Day when our indigenous people with many others see it stolen by Europeans and claimed for England. For many emotions run high and the failure of the Voice referendum has added to their pain and call for compensation and greater recognition of their claims. Others celebrate the day with pride focusing on our achievements and freedoms. As I wrote in this week's bulletin any future Australia should however seek reconciliation with our indigenous brothers and sisters, acknowledging the mistakes of the past and address a new way forward calling for harmony and social cohesion for all. After the Bondi murders, we must consider what binds Australians together, and what must change if national unity is to be more than a ritual assumption? Political point scoring must stop and the churches have an important role to play in calling for reconciliation and justice for our indigenous brothers and sisters and an end to all forms of discrimination and exclusion from community life.

Amen