

**Collect, Readings and Sermon for Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2021**  
**The Third Sunday before Advent**

**Collect**

Heavenly Lord,  
you long for the world's salvation:  
stir us from apathy,  
restrain us from excess  
and revive in us new hope  
that all creation will one day be healed  
in Jesus Christ our Lord.

**Amen.**

**Psalm 62:6-14**

For God alone my soul in silence waits;  
truly, my hope is in him.  
He alone is my rock and my salvation,  
my stronghold, so that I shall not be shaken.  
In God is my safety and my honour;  
God is my strong rock and my refuge.  
Put your trust in him always, O people,  
pour out your hearts before him, for God is our refuge.  
Those of high degree are but a fleeting breath,  
even those of low estate cannot be trusted.  
On the scales they are lighter than a breath,  
all of them together.  
Put no trust in extortion;  
in robbery take no empty pride;  
though wealth increase, set not your heart upon it.  
God has spoken once, twice have I heard it,  
that power belongs to God.  
Steadfast love is yours, O Lord,  
for you repay everyone according to his deeds.

**Mark 1:14-20**

Now after John was arrested, Jesus came to Galilee, proclaiming the good news of God, and saying, 'The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news.'

As Jesus passed along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake—for they were fishermen. And Jesus said to them, 'Follow me and I will make you fish for people.' And immediately they left their nets and followed him. As he went a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John, who were in their boat mending the nets. Immediately he called them; and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men, and followed him.

## Sermon by John Richardson

What it is to be popular! It is what some people aspire to in the belief that popularity will make life full and meaningful. How and why should we want to be popular? And what does it mean to be popular?

Today popularity is measured in terms of how many followers you have on Twitter or Facebook or Instagram.

If social media had been around in the time of Jesus how many followers would he have had? And why would they become his followers?

- Would it be that they stand to gain something to their advantage?
- Would it be because a follower would themselves become popular by being seen to be a follower of Jesus?
- Would it be because it would somehow be seen to be a disadvantage not to be seen to be a follower?
- Would it be because you don't want to miss out on what's going on?

The opening of Mark's Gospel is about two things - the proclamation of the Kingdom of God and the gathering of disciples. Those two things have nothing to do with popularity. Quite the opposite. And yet they are the essence of the Gospel.

The message is quite simple - it is about the good news of the arrival of God's Kingdom. It's not just news, it's GOOD news.

- It is not some new religion.
- It is not a call to become a theologian.
- It is not an insurance policy for our future safety and well-being.
- It is not a call to become more holy.

It is about the arrival of God's new order in the world and the way in which we respond to that Good News. It is about God's rule and that it is here now. We have to see the point of that good news and that it really is good news. It is about a call to repentance: to a change of heart and mind that leads to a change in behaviour and direction.

It is not about us and our needs, our search for meaning or our concern about sin and wrongdoing or the state of the world. It is about focussing on what God has done in Jesus and what that means for us.

- We have to remember that this is God's agenda.
- We have to let that determine our thinking.
- We have to turn in a new direction and bring our lives into line with what God is doing.
- We do not need to reconstruct God's agenda to meet our own needs or our schemes for the future of the world.

I have just completed my safeguarding training. I was amazed at the amount of information I was expected to take on board. Most of which I will probably forget.

It was difficult to put most of this information aside in order to focus on what really is the point of safeguarding - the safety and well-being of children and vulnerable adults.

A similar problem arises when we are confronted with the Gospel. There is so much in it. Much of it seems either unnecessary or irrelevant. How can I be expected to take all this on board? It is too much and I am not up to the task.

And then I come to today's Gospel. Here I discover that the call of Jesus is simplicity itself - follow me. We are given a simple ultimatum that we can accept or refuse.

To accept is an awesome responsibility. It is a responsibility to live as if the Kingdom of God is already here among us. It is the responsibility to hand on the treasures of that Kingdom to future generations.

The German theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a great influence on my own thinking. He was very much at the centre of theological thinking when I was at theological college. It was then that his writings began to appear in English. In one of his books he set out to answer such questions as

- What do we mean by discipleship?
- What do we have to do to be disciples?
- What difference will it make to my life if I decide to become a disciple?

He concluded that these are all the wrong questions. The question we should be asking is "What will it cost?" Hence the title of his book: "The Cost of Discipleship." Bonhoeffer wrote his book in response to the evils of the Nazi regime in Germany. He wanted to know what it meant for a Christian to live a life of obedience to God in relation to the evil and wrongdoing and injustice that was happening around him. What did it mean to follow Jesus in this situation? It was clear to him that a Christian response would be a costly one. It certainly was for him. He was executed at the end of the war for his opposition to the Nazi regime.

What is the cost of discipleship? It is not a question we usually ask. But perhaps we should.

Did those first disciples ask that question? What would discipleship cost them? What would be the implications of becoming disciples? A loss of their livelihood? A loss of friends and family and a settled and stable home life? A breakdown in relationships? An uncertain future?

What is the cost of discipleship?

It is not so much a matter of asking the question: it is coming to realise that with discipleship there is a cost. There is no way we can be disciples without some cost.

The COP 26 delegates from around the world are meeting in Glasgow at the UN Climate Change Conference. Each one will come with their own agenda. Each will come with their own hopes and fears for the future. Each will come with their ideas about what needs to be done to save the planet and to change the way in which we look at our use and abuse of its resources. They know that there will be a cost in whatever decisions they make. They also know that there will be a cost if they do not make those decisions or if they make the wrong ones.

So it is with our discipleship as followers of Jesus. The call to follow may sound very simple. But there is so much that is left to us. There is so much that we have to decide for ourselves as we try to put that call into action.

Inevitably it means making decisions: decisions about how we live our lives; how we relate to others; how we treat God's world and his creation; how we understand that call to "follow me."

Thankfully, we are not alone in making those decisions. We are promised that we will have all the help we need through the grace and love and goodness of God.

Let me close with some words from Psalm 62, the first of our readings appointed for today:

For God alone my soul in silence waits;  
truly, my hope is in him.  
He alone is my rock and my salvation,  
my stronghold, so that I shall not be shaken.  
Put your trust in him always, O people,  
pour out your hearts before him, for God is our refuge.

Amen.