

Jesus Calls Us

Matthew 4:12-23

Some of us didn't experience a great year in 2019. We may have trudged through one deep struggle after another, so our prayers for 2020 were for better things, greater joy, and that the deep sadness associated with certain still-fresh wounds would slowly fade with God's healing word.

We are only 26 days into the New Year, and I've attended six funerals; and there's been others that I couldn't attend. Despite blessed significant rain, bushfires have continued to wreak havoc on our landscape, public infrastructure, private homes and communities in many places.

Regardless of how last year was for you, or how this year may or may not be meeting expectations, one truth still rings clear amidst it all. We are not alone. Not ever! God is "with us". On the heels of the celebration of the birth of our King, that reminder has the power to carry us right into a fresh, new start. He is Immanuel, God with us. And though things and people around us shift and change, our God never changes. As expressed in Ps 119 — His word is a light to our path.

John the Baptist was having quite a good year — many people had come out to hear him preaching repentance and calling them to be ready for the coming Messiah. The highlight had been when Jesus, God's chosen servant, the Lamb of God, came to John and to be baptized in order to fulfil all righteousness (not that Jesus needed to repent and be cleansed of any sin).

Now John's year has suddenly changed. He is suffering in the confines of a cell, and he begins to wonder if all that had happened concerning Jesus was actually real. His voice has been silenced — the voice of one crying out in the desert 'prepare the way of the Lord' was now timid and unsure about the future. Indeed, John must decrease and Jesus increase.



A new light had dawned with the arrival of Jesus, and prophecies concerning the Messiah were being fulfilled by him in the region of Galilee of the gentiles. Now Jesus's voice was being heard. God was speaking directly to his people. But even with this wonderful and long-awaited arrival, change was difficult for some, including John and his followers.

For others, the newness of his preaching about the Kingdom was exciting and exhilarating. They'd talked with him and heard him speaking, had never met anyone so inspiring, wondered if he could be the promised One.



That morning they saw him coming while he was some way off, and pretended to be busy with their nets, heads bent, but watching through their eyebrows... As he drew level with them, he stopped, and spoke to them, and their hearts pounded.

Just to be with him would be beyond their wildest dreams; and to be of use to him, give new direction to their gifts and skills, even their roughness and lack of

formal learning; their response was eager and immediate... they left their nets and followed him. Immediately!

From all his disciples, he would choose some whom he could train and send on mission, apostles of the Kingdom. Deliberately he would choose twelve — as a sign of the New Israel; later, sent out in two's, they would increase the preaching seven-fold.

They were a mixed bunch, with more availability than ability (all male, but not selected as a judgement against women but rather as those who could live rough, and travel without bringing shame to him or their families). Five were fishermen, one a businessman, four had been zealots, three pairs of brothers, several were already friends, only one southerner — and no shepherds among them.



They had complementing and conflicting temperaments — impetuous, cautious, arrogant, humble, perceptive, hesitant, quick-tempered, one sure he was always right — and they had to learn to live and work together. They couldn't help but be attracted to him, to be at ease in his loving presence and his confidence in them and his acceptance of them.

Most of all, they had to learn from him, they had so much to learn from him about God and the Kingdom, the world, and other people, and themselves, and about love and servant leadership. Still he comes and calls you by name, calls forward skills and gifts for the service of the kingdom, calls you to forgive and live at peace with one another as we receive his peace and forgiveness.



We give ourselves to him — and he gives us to each other. He gives his church gifts and leaders, but all are to learn his servant leadership. These fishers of men / these shepherds are not to distract, lead away, or exercise power over others by presenting themselves as the focus. Not even if one were to appear as an

angel with exciting words and eloquence should we be fooled into taking our eyes off Jesus, who has called us to himself. Do not become a disciple of any other.

We have to learn to work together with all who follow him. If and when any disharmony arises, then the hearts, eyes, and ears of all are to focus on him, for he is the source of all healing, of restoration and life in the Spirit. We have so much to learn from him. And yet we are tempted to hold on to bitterness and hurts. We could be freed by repentance and forgiveness, but we nurse our hurts and harbor resentment; we become disciples of another spirit that is foreign and not of God. Calling people names, attacking people instead of wrong actions and attitudes, spreading rumours and misinformation are not actions sourced in the fount of the Holy Spirit. Distance yourself from such darkness which has no place in the body of Christ — the light of the God of love.

Satan finds a foothold even in the souls of people within the church when they start following their own desires or open a doorway of bitterness for him to exploit. Satan would have Christians follow Apollos or Paul or some other teacher with passion. He desires to cause them to abandon their walk of discipleship following Christ. If he can't have them abandon the church fully, he'll use them to cause division and disruption to the church's mission. Satan distorts the free gift of salvation and what a Christian is, by filling their ears and hearts with things other than the pure

May the Holy Spirit, not satan or the spirit of this age, be our teacher. May our eyes only be on Christ and our ears be discerning of the truth of any teaching. God's word is truth and will heal and comfort, bring correction, produce repentance and forgiveness. He will encourage and direct us, will unify and empower us, will soften and renew our hearts, will always be with us and for us.

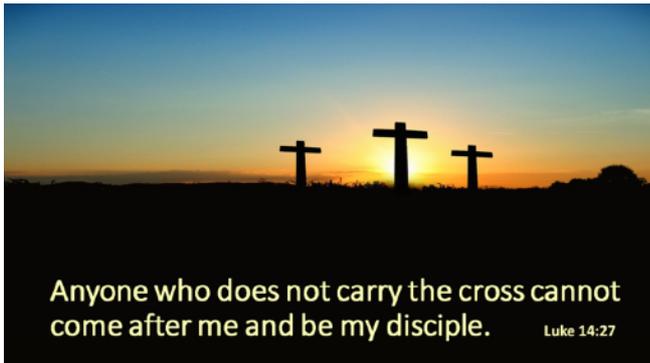
Fully confident in the word of life, let's join with the psalmist who sought God's heart:

"I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you." Ps. 119:11

"I run in the path of your commands, for you have set my heart free." Ps. 119:32

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path." Ps. 119:105

"Great peace have they who love your law, and nothing can make them stumble." Ps. 119:165



Lord, we thank you for the great richness and Truth of Your Word. Thank you that your Word is a light for our path, a lamp to our feet, that gives direction for our days. May we faithfully live each day according to your ways. Help us to love your words, to hide them within our hearts. Open our eyes that we might see your deep and hidden treasures, and know you more and more. Help us to run in the path of your commands, thank you that you set our hearts free... free from fear, from

bitterness and the need for retribution, free to let go the ways of the world and free to follow you for loving service. Amen.