

Matthew 4 v12 -23

Isaiah 9 v 1-4

Psalm 27

### On a Mission

May the words of my mouth and the thoughts of my heart be always acceptable in your sight O Lord. Amen

Some of you, like me, will remember the television programme, Mission Impossible that then became a series of films. The start was always the same with Jim, Dan or Ethan Hunt receiving a message that started 'Your Mission, should you choose to accept it is...' and ended with 'this message will self destruct in 5 seconds'. This is what came to mind instantly when I read the title for this morning's sermon 'On a Mission'.

Like Jim, Dan or Ethan Hunt we do have a choice as to whether we accept the message from God sending us on our mission, but, unlike them, our message does not self destruct, in fact it has stood the test of time and 2000 years on is still strong and needed more than ever. Although I said we had a choice, it does seem that if we ignore our calling God gets through to us in another way!

So what is the message that is offered to us? This morning's Gospel reading tells us of Jesus setting out on his mission to preach the good news of the kingdom of God. He has been baptised by John the Baptist in the River Jordan; he has gone away on his own to plan his way forward and been tempted by the devil, which has shown him what he must not do to bring people to God and, now, hearing of John's arrest he knows that it is time for him to start God's work. The text says that he left Nazareth and went to Capernaum, a town by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali, which is where most of his public ministry occurs. This is predicted in Isaiah ch 9 v1 -4 and v2 says that 'the people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned'. This light is, of course, Jesus and his message of how to obtain God's kingdom. The first thing people have to do is repent, and this echoes the message of John the Baptist. Then they can see the light that Jesus brings and be drawn into it.

Jesus walks beside the Sea of Galilee and calls to Simon and his brother Andrew who were fishing together by casting a net into the water. His words are 'Come, follow me'. There are no ifs or buts. It is a definite call that demands an immediate response. Luke's account has Jesus helping the disciples find a large catch after a session of teaching the crowd. Whichever account is accurate, the result is the same. Simon and Andrew become followers of Jesus. They will become part of his group of close disciples and later Simon will be appointed to lead the group after Jesus' death and his story continues through Acts. His faith will waver at times, as when he denied knowing Jesus after his arrest, but he has been called for a mission that is going to take over the rest of his life. He is the one who, before the Transfiguration, recognises Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus asks Simon directly who he thinks he is and Simon replies 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.' At this point Jesus says Simon will be known as Peter from then on as he is the rock on whom the church will be built. Peter comes from the Greek word Petra, meaning stone or rock. The call that Simon receives from Jesus sends him on a mission that changes his life and that of many around him as he leads people to God and is pivotal in the early church.

James and his brother John are called next and they leave their nets and their father Zebedee to follow Jesus. This John is later referred to as 'the disciple who Jesus loved' and is believed to be the author of the Gospel of John. John's acceptance of a simple call from God, via Jesus, leads to far reaching changes in his life and particularly through his Gospel, to influence many other lives.

Jesus' mission is to tell people about God and his kingdom and bring them into it. The Old Testament has recorded many occasions when God has brought his message to the people, particularly the Jews, His chosen people, but Jesus' mission is broader and he is reaching out to Gentiles as well. The last verse of today's Gospel reading says that Jesus had a threefold ministry, teaching, preaching and healing. He would have taught in the Synagogues on the Sabbath but during the week he would have addressed much larger crowds in the open air.

Earlier I referred to the passage in Isaiah where Jesus is described as a light shining in the darkness. We take light for granted all too often today. At the flick of a switch we have light and can see with our eyes. The light of Jesus is more than seeing with our eyes, it is a glow that should encompass our whole lives and it involves spreading the good news of Jesus around us; it is living a life that reflects God's way. In John's Gospel (ch8 v12) Jesus said 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness but have the light of life'. In the Old Testament God appeared as a fiery pillar to lead the Israelites through the Red Sea; Moses had to hide his face from God as He was too bright; at Jesus' Transfiguration his face shone like the sun and his clothes became as white as the light. Jesus talked about us not hiding our light under a bushel. Conversely when evil or the devil are mentioned the language is that of dark and shade. Our mission is to be God's light in the world. To be an infectious light.

We use lighthouses to warn ships that there is danger; we use torches to show us a path when there are no lights; our cars have powerful lights so that we can see where we are going at night. We use light to keep us going in the right direction. Jesus is our light. We receive his word and see the light through prayer and reading the Bible, through mixing with other Christians, coming to church and being part of a house group.

We may not have experienced a call as Simon or John did, but have you ever wondered why you're here and what you're supposed to do with your life? I certainly have! As Christians, we have a clear mission to carry out that too many of us miss.

Jesus spoke directly to His disciples before He ascended to heaven about their mission on earth. This mission isn't just their mission, but ours too. "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." Matthew 28:19-20

So what does this look like for us? It should be our everyday life. You don't have to be a missionary to fulfill this call. Some are called to be entrepreneurs, stay at home mums, nurses, teachers, coaches, taxi drivers, engineers and so the list goes on. It is not what we do in our day job that matters; it is how we use the opportunities we have to lead others towards Jesus. You simply have to be a light of Jesus where you are now. God doesn't place people in your life for no reason. You don't just run across people dealing with trials and tragedy for no reason. Speak about Jesus and God's Kingdom with encouragement when you have the chance. Show God's love through your life and your actions. Bring others into God's light. You can plant seeds into every person you come across and they may not come to harvest until many years later. But your influence, you being God's light, shedding rays of his light, whilst on his mission, was part of the difference. People should be able to see that there is something different about our lives, the choices we make, our attitudes and reactions: let them ask us about what influences us and leads us so that we may shed Christ's light widely and truly be on a mission for him. A mission that we are pleased to accept.

Lord Jesus, please give us a sense of urgency to share your love and truth with others. Remind us to at all times be alert and not lose sight of what our mission is. Give us the strength to stand up for what is right and be a light everywhere we go. In Jesus' name, amen