



# Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew  
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 21 January 2024

## Epiphany 3

Today we see Jesus at the beginning of his public ministry, proclaiming the good news and calling his first disciples. We listen hard to what he tells us about what this means for us.

*The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God has come near; repent, and believe in the good news. (Mark 1.15)*

### **An illustration to set the scene**

'Just one thing – with Michael Mosley' is a radio programme that each week presents you with one small change you could make to your lifestyle that might have a dramatic effect on your health and wellbeing. It has a regular format -evidence presented by an expert and an account of experience from a punter who is given the task of trying out the change for a week and reporting back how they found it. The crucial final question is: will they keep going and integrate the new behaviour into their daily life?

On different occasions I have been persuaded that I should brush my teeth *before* breakfast, stand while working at my desk or not eat from early evening til mid-morning. I love the promise of the difference that each change would make to my life, but the intention to make the change doesn't last. It's just one *more* thing and joins a

long list of things that would be good for me if I could do them every day – an hour of yoga, half an hour of Greek and so on. I know they'd do me good, but there is just too much else I need to do.

## **Today's Gospel teaching**

In just 7 verses Mark vividly describes the beginning of the world-shattering change ushered in by the start of Jesus' ministry on earth. Having been baptised by John, Jesus had been driven into the wilderness by the Spirit where he struggled with Satan. But John has been arrested and now is the time for Jesus to take up his mission.

It is to Galilee that he comes and it worth paying attention to every word and phrase that we are told.

The beginning of his ministry is a time of *fulfilment*. For Jesus' presence is the working out of God's promise to be with God's people and to bring them salvation. And then what Jesus has to say is astonishing to a people oppressed by a colonial power, struggling with poverty, subject to all manner of diseases and surrounded by corrupt officials and collaborators. He says, '*the kingdom of God has come near*'. The future promise of God has been actualised. It is not yet complete, but it is close. The world as it appears is not the whole reality, for within it God is at work and God's kingdom has come within touching distance in the presence of Jesus himself. He both announces and is in his person the transformative power of God breaking into ordinary life.

Jesus doesn't offer people a programme, he calls them to respond to what God is already doing: *repent and believe the good news*. In the face of the demonstration of God's loving promise, the only appropriate response is a change of heart, repentance, a turning away from all that crushes God's image in humankind and towards life.

And that is only possible by trusting the good news – the truth that Jesus, the Son of God, offers all that we need to approach God and to find hope for our own lives and for the world.

And it is no coincidence that Jesus' first act is to call disciples. Because the response to God's love is the business of community, the fellowship of those who are made new in Christ. What Jesus asks is simply that they follow. And what he offers is a change of identity, not just one thing, but a completely new way of living and dying in the light of the good news that God's saving grace is real, a way of life focused on seeking out people with whom to share the good news.

### **How can we apply the teaching to our own lives?**

Why then is that call not being heard today, at least in our western society? There is considerable analysis of why religious identity is declining – consumerism, the 'me' culture', the loss of one overarching story that gives meaning to people's lives, the declining trust in institutions, the loss of the habit of church going...

Should we then be suggesting just one thing that people could try in order to find God and live more meaningful lives? There are plenty of campaigns that come close to this – *Try Praying!* for instance. It can't hurt, but I'm not convinced.

If we take Jesus as our model for evangelism, then it starts not with *our* efforts but with acknowledging what God is doing. With our being people of hope who can see the good news of God at work, however bleak the world around us. People like the Israeli mother whose son had been taken hostage by Hamas and had then been killed by Israeli soldiers. She asked for understanding for those soldiers because she said, they too had mothers who were hurting.

And it continues with a lifelong effort to follow Jesus in the way that he showed us, praising God and loving others. For we were bought with a price and saved for a purpose, to join in showing God's love in the world. It is God who did the one thing that makes a difference in sending the Son. And Jesus doesn't ask us to add on another task. He asks us to become wholly different people – people who follow him.

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