Before Advent 2021 11 am

*St Mark 1.14-20*

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Come, my Way, my Truth, my Life;
Such a Way as gives us breath,
Such a Truth as ends all strife,
Such a Life as killeth death.

Come, my Light, my Feast, my Strength;
Such a Light as shows a Feast,
Such a Feast as mends in length,
Such a Strength as makes his guest.

Come, my Joy, my Love, my Heart;
Such a Joy as none can move,
Such a Love as none can part,
Such a Heart as joys in love.

George Herbert’s short poem *The Call* is simple and direct, indeed, it is almost completely composed of words of just a single syllable.

Nevertheless, the poem is full of allusions to the Old and New testaments, as well as to the liturgy of the Church of England, the
Church in which he served as deacon and priest doing the reign of Charles I.

'The way, the truth and the life'. 'Come' is the call of the poet to God, but it is also the response of the poet to a call from God.

The first word of each verse is the invitation “Come”!

In the middle of today’s Gospel reading we here that word of invitation again, “Come”, but this time it is an invitation not from the believer for Jesus to come, as way and truth and life, breath, light, feast. Strength, joy and love but a word of invitation from him who is all of these things, to others to join him.

Come!, come Simon, Andrew, James and John, come and follow me! Come, Betty, David, Juan, Yves, Sergio – Come!

Simon, Andrew, James and John and the other disciples responded with alacrity to Jesus’ invitation to come. They left their boats and their nets and their families and they followed. They swapped trawling for fish and started fishing for men and women.

Simon, Andrew, James and John, found Jesus to be all the things that George Herbert listed: way, truth, life, breath, light, feast, strength, joy and love and much else besides. They joined him in a life in which they did not know from one day to the next where their next meal was coming from, where they would lay their heads at night, which would be the next group to run them out of town or try top arrest them, but they followed. They followed from Galilee and from Jordan and down through the centuries men and women have followed them in following him who said Come to a few uneducated fishermen.
We are very used, I think, to asking Jesus to Come! Come to us in our sickness, come to us in the darkness, come to us in the troubles and trials of life! Come, is the great advent cry which we will utter in just a few weeks’ time, Come, Lord Jesus, come and rescue us from all that hides us from the perfect vision of God’s glory, come and rescue us from time and space so that we can be with you for ever!

But, if we are truly honest, how much do we allow ourselves to hear Jesus’ call to us?

Do we really keep our eyes and our ears open? Are we as ready as Simon, Andrew, James and John for the most extraordinary of all possible adventures, travelling through life in the loving companionship of him through whom all things have come to be and in whom all things will finally find their completion?

It comes as great surprise to many people, perhaps most people that Jesus doesn’t just call ‘other’ people – that he calls everyone. Yes, even you – or you – or you!

His call is not necessarily to the priesthood or to the religious life – in some ways those are the easiest of all calls to respond to. Jesus can call us to be a doctor or a bricklayer or an engineer or even a member of parliament for him. Howsoever he calls, and whatsoever he calls us to, he does call! And he expects a response.

Before we get to the heady height of Advent in three weeks’ time, try and find just a few minutes each day to listen out for Jesus’ call. Don’t block your ears to it or screw your eyes every more tightly shut to it, open your hearts to it – open your hearts to Jesus and
really, really listen – then once you have responded to his invitation to you, ask him to come to you.

He calls us all to step aboard his ship,  
Take the adventure on this morning’s wing,  
Raise sail with him, launch out into the deep,  
Whatever storms or floods are threatening.  
If faith gives way to doubt, or love to fear,  
Then, as on Galilee, we’ll rouse the Lord,  
For he is always with us and will hear  
And make our peace with his creative Word,  
Who made us, loved us, formed us and has set  
All his beloved lovers in an ark;  
Borne upwards by his Spirit, we will float  
Above the rising waves, the falling dark,  
As fellow pilgrims, driven towards that haven,  
Where all will be redeemed, fulfilled, forgiven. ii

Amen.

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i Herbert, G., The Call from The Temple, 1633
ii Guite, M., Sounding the Seasons: Seventy sonnets for Christian year