



# Season of Lay Ministries

## Third Sunday of Epiphany

### 22 January

#### Immediately

##### Readings

Isaiah 9:1-4

Psalm 27: 1, 4-12

1 Corinthians 1:1-18

Matthew 4: 12-23

You're asleep and then suddenly awake. There's an alarm going off and you're in a hotel. You leap out of bed and grab a coat and some shoes - don't use the lift - you make your way down to where people are assembling. You're at work, in the middle of an important meeting. The alarm goes off. You know what to do - don't bring anything with you - but you grab your coat and phone, just in case, and head to the assembly point.

It's always a shock when those kind of things happen, just at the most inconvenient moment but you know you have to react and head immediately for safety, respond immediately to the sound of the alarm.

That word 'immediately' occurs twice in the really familiar gospel passage for today. Jesus is in Capernaum, the town that he has made his home, his base, the place in which so much will in fact happen, so many miracles will occur, and he is at the edge of the water, looking out at the boats and those working on them. He calls to two of those he can see, then he calls to another two. 'Follow me', he says, 'Follow me'. Both sets of brothers drop everything and respond as if to an alarm suddenly going off, they respond immediately and leave everything behind - their job, their family, their livelihood - and follow the one whose call they have heard.

What on earth can be so urgent that it needs this kind of response? What could be so important that it breaks through all conventional wisdom? But Matthew is clear in the use of this word 'immediately' that this was a call that would not wait, this was a call to be responded to - immediately.

Jesus is on a mission, he hasn't long to achieve what he knows is his father's will, and he seems to know that he hasn't got long, and the task that he has to do, as he sets off at pace in front of his disciples who always seem to be playing catch up, is to change lives and to save lives. His call has kingdom urgency. As the prophet Isaiah says in the first reading, there are yokes to be shattered, rods of oppression to be broken, bars to be lifted, people needing to be liberated. This is all the stuff of kingdom urgency because without that liberating witness to the love of God, people are still going to be in bondage, people are still going to feel oppression, people will still feel the weight of enslavement - and Jesus is here to bring them, to bring us, to freedom.

There are many reasons to ignore a call to ministry - any ministry. There's always lots going on in our lives, the responsibilities of life, of family, of work that can easily be put first, there is the mañana principle, putting it off until tomorrow, but tomorrow is always a day away. Jesus challenges us with the call today, in our today, just as he called into the today of Simon and Andrew, into the today of James and John. They had so many reasons not to leap from their boat, to leave their nets, to tread the path of obedience - but somehow they got the urgency, the Spirit revealed something to them and liberated them to embrace what ministry would mean for them.

In our second reading Paul is writing to the Christian community in Corinth. He has a call for them, the call of God for them, in their ministry as a church, a ministry already being embraced by Chloe and others in the community. But he says this to them

God is faithful; by him you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

It is the faithful God who always calls us, who calls us in fellowship and into fellowship, not to go it alone in any of the ministries to which we are called, but to go with others and to go with Christ. Our faithful God knows us beyond the extent to which we know

ourselves, knows our strengths and our weaknesses, knows our fears and our reluctance, yet also knows that we too are faithful.

The task is urgent, Jesus needs to be proclaimed, the cross embraced, resurrection experienced and it can't wait until we are ready, until the time is right for us. For those brothers it was probably the wrong moment, just as the catch was being landed, just as the nets were being mended, but they responded immediately.

God stands at the shoreline and calls us - 'Follow me'. Maybe? Tomorrow? Immediately? What response do we make? What response dare we make to the God who is calling us now?

Amen.

*The Very Revd Andrew Nunn  
Dean of Southwark*

## Prayer

God, call us urgently,  
insistently,  
that we may respond  
immediately  
and follow  
and serve  
in Jesus' name.

**Amen**

## Suggested hymns

Hark a herald voice is calling

Jesus calls us! O'er the tumult

Will you come and follow me if I but call  
your name: John L Bell

Speak, O Lord By Keith and Kristyn Getty

Take my life: Chris Tomlin  
(a modern version of the classic hymn words)

Build your kingdom here: Rend Collective