

2026 TALK, 22.2.26, MARK 1:9-20 & MARK 3:13-19

LENT SERIES: 'JESUS, THE DISCIPLES & DISCIPLE-MAKING – BUILDING THE CHURCH THROUGH SMALL GROUPS'

"I CHOOSE YOU, I WANT YOU"...

What does it feel like to be picked out of a crowd? Remember school days & team captains picking people for a team? You get chosen & you puff out your chest. You stand a bit taller. You feel chuffed. You feel 'special'. There must be something positive about you that has been spotted. But this is a double-edged experience isn't it? What about those not chosen from the crowd? They feel overlooked, left behind, under-appreciated, rejected even. Significant that the gospel writers do not go there. Perhaps this is partly because they were very aware that there would be plenty of opportunity for others to become followers of Jesus, in the days ahead.

This small group of 12 disciples is just the beginning, the kernel of a people movement which, after the death & resurrection of Jesus, swept through the whole Roman Empire & beyond - within a single generation... A movement which 'chose' anyone who heeded the call to follow Jesus. Anyone who says 'yes' to Kingdom of God on earth, is chosen to belong to the new creation. This is a 'choseness' which is a deeply personal & individual experience. But it's also a collective choseness – within the chosen family of God.

Inevitably. There are three things I want to pick out about Mark 1 & Mark 3. Firstly, there are **two** 'callings out' for the disciples. We see the calling of Simon & Andrew, James & John - up close & personal. Jesus walks beside the Sea of Galilee and tells four fishermen to follow him. **Then** Jesus **second** 'calling out' is when Jesus goes up a mountain with a crowd of followers. And he calls people from within the crowd to be his disciples. He adds 8 more disciples to the 4 he has already called. So, we can see, straight away there's an expectation of multiplication here. One disciple suddenly has two more beside him, one at either shoulder. From a tiny group to a group x3 as big... This is a movement that is recruiting others very quickly. People responding to the voice of Jesus. Jesus declares with authority: "Come to me. I want you & you... & you & you"...

Secondly, Jesus moves from the temptations of the wilderness to the mountain-top. A deliberate echo here, I suggest, of Moses & God's people in the wilderness. But instead of Moses descending from his solitary mountain-top experience, Jesus invites the people up the mountain, to hear the voice of

God there together. Jesus doesn't descend with God's Law written beforehand on two tablets of stone. Instead, he calls the people to himself, as living stones on which God's Word will be written in the future... This is a Christ-centred movement, which is carried in people's hearts, here, there & everywhere. PTL!

Thirdly, and most importantly. Why does Jesus choose & appoint these 12 as his disciples? Simply for these reasons: ***So that they might be with Jesus, the Sent One, & so that Jesus might send them out to share the good news.*** The One who has authority to call others, then gives others the authority to preach & do wonders in the name of Jesus. So that others would follow Jesus. And so on. We often complicate sharing the gospel & making disciples. But it really is, according to the gospels, very simple. Anyone called by Jesus, God's Living Word, then has the authority to call others to Jesus. This doesn't mean we are all called to 'preach'. But we are all called, in the winsome way of God's Holy Spirit, to appeal gently to others. To have a ready reason, to explain to others who ask, about the hope we have.

After what I said at the start of this talk – is it true that being called & chosen by Jesus is a matter of pride?... Clearly not. From what we know of the mistakes & the stumblings of the first disciples, this is clearly not so. And the words of the Apostle Paul should quickly shrivel any sense of pride about ***our*** calling. Paul wrote: 'God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong... so that no-one may boast before the LORD'...

Why on earth would God choose me, for goodness sake? Except to show that God's grace can do remarkable things, even with the most awful sinners... People often speculate about why Jesus chose this particular 12... We know very little about many of the first disciples. But we do know that they often struggled to get on together... But what is sometimes overlooked, partly because of this speculation about why Jesus chose these particular individuals, is this: Jesus didn't do anything on his own. (Except of course for his previous temptation in the wilderness & the agonising trial of the cross that lay before him). Jesus began and finished his ministry with this 12. The bedrock of the church was not one 'Simon-Peter' but a small group of often failing disciples. It is impossible to emphasise this enough. The ministry of Jesus, like the Rabbis of his day, began & finished each day as a 'school of prayer'. A mini 'community of faith'. A small group that was always on the move. They learned by living together with Jesus. ***Always learning together.***

The disciples' most obvious lessons come not really from one-to-one time with Jesus. Although that **was** very important. Jesus often made a point of trying to get alone time with the disciples. But this, it seems to me, was primarily to give time for rest. There's not much evidence that Jesus used this time as a prime opportunity for a lot more teaching. Here's a fact for you. Which might surprise you: There aren't that many examples of one-to-one moments between one person & Jesus on his own. Jesus & Nicodemus talking privately one night, yes. Jesus with the woman at the well, yes. Jesus predicting that Peter would disown him, yes... But the disciples learned mostly through interacting with the other disciples, in the presence of Jesus. They learned a lot too by meeting with people in the crowds that followed Jesus. And by engaging in controversies with Jesus' opponents, who often came to test him & to try to trick him.

Jesus derived his energy from both the private on one hand, & the public on the other. He loved times of prayer alone with His loving Heavenly Father. And Jesus also loved the daily encounters with people loved by God. And in between the private & the public was the dynamic of this small group of the disciples. Together this small group of faithful followers got to experiment with walking in step with God's Spirit. Likewise with **us**. It is only by **us** walking with Jesus & living in the company of other followers (as well as the larger crowd of the curious & the opposed to Christ), that **we** get to grow in faith.

Which brings me to a question for us all to ponder. Hopefully you are still with me at this point – because this is important... Carey B.C, at the beginning of Lent needs to be asking this question: **'How can we together grow in faith & service?'** And I don't think the answer is – 'by spending an hour a week worshipping together'. If Jesus' foundation for his ministry was a small group of followers spending time together, where are the small groups at Carey? I believe that last autumn's Alpha course has pointed the way forward for our church. Now those who took part in Alpha course have led us to start another small group, based on the 'The Bible Course' by the Bible Society. Seven people or so who did Alpha will be doing this course. *But it is also open to anyone from the congregation who would like a 'refresher' about reading & understanding the Bible...* So I would encourage you all, if you have any free time on alternate Wednesday nights, to consider joining with us. We will be meeting in the Church Lounge, 7.30pm this Wednesday night. But if that's too short notice, you could always join with us for the 2nd session on Wed 11th March. It should be easy to could catch up with the group, as session 1 is a general introduction. (8 sessions, from Genesis to Revelation. God willing, we will finish in July).

Earlier this month, I brought the skeleton of a proposal to the church leadership team. A proposal to introduce a small group strategy for our church for the next 2 or 3 years. The thinking behind this is to develop deeper & better relationships within our church; to grow our faith, through action, prayer & discussion; to enable people to identify their own & other people's gifts. And for each small group to enhance the church's pastoral care, along with our existing Pastoral Care Team.

Almost inevitably someone commented: 'We tried this before & it didn't work'. And I understand & appreciate how this would be an immediate discouragement from again trying a small-group strategy for Carey. But let's remember - the social sciences tell us that within any group of people there are both 'early opposers' and 'early adopters' to any supposedly 'new idea'. And indeed, there were such differences within the first 12 disciples.

So, the only thing I feel I need to say is this: 'If this idea is just being driven by me, then it will fail... And I have to be honest with myself... I do indeed have a proven track record of coming up with some 'crazy ideas' which don't get off the ground... But I would ask you to consider whether this is just another one of 'Colin's crazy ideas'... Might this just possibly be instead not just a good idea but a 'God idea'...?

Perhaps we could all pray about this. If you do, there are 3 things to bear in mind, as we pray about this through Lent & beyond:

Firstly, Mark's gospel and the other gospels make it clear that the building block Jesus chose for the church was the small group.

Secondly, the Book of Acts shows us that the early church continued this pattern in Jerusalem and wherever churches were planted, across Europe.

Thirdly and finally – Carey's recent experience. We have seen people come to faith through Alpha small groups. People are asking to be baptised and come into membership, partly because of their experience of small groups.

Is God saying something to Carey right now about growing in faith through small groups?... I wonder...!

Finally this: is Jesus calling to you personally this morning? Do you hear Jesus' voice?. I believe Jesus is saying to each of us: "I choose you, I want you"... You may ask: 'Why me LORD?' That's the same question of the 1st disciples... Thanks be to God for the good news of Jesus. For God's love for every one here!

