

Matthew 4: 12-23 Jesus calls the first disciples

When Jesus called his first disciples, we know that it was after spending a night in prayer, so that he could be with his father God for long enough to know that they would be the right people for the tasks that they would have to do, especially when he was no longer with them.

What we don't know much about is what else Jesus had already put in place for the work he wanted them to do, once they started travelling around the area with their message that the kingdom of God was at hand. When Jesus was with the disciples preaching and healing, there was not much time to arrange the practicalities: they obviously had some money because Judas kept the common purse and on one occasion the disciples had brought some bread with them; on another famous occasion at the feeding of the five thousand they had not.

Early on in their ministry, there was an occasion where some disciples asked Jesus where he was staying and he said come and see; so he had obviously already arranged for somewhere to stay and they went and spent the day there with him. So someone was providing hospitality and must have been happy to welcome two more for lunch at short notice.

There are little hints in the gospels that lead us to think that there were several women who supported the disciples with their own funds. One was a woman who had her own purple cloth-making business and seems to have been able to contribute generously to their cause.

When Peter left his fishing business to follow Jesus, he may already have had a wife and family to support, as we read of one occasion where the disciples went back to Peter's house and his mother-in-law was ill. This must have been an inconvenience when they had turned up hoping for some supper, so Jesus healed

her and she got up and waited on them, but someone must have grown the food or bought it from a local shop.

Other disciples might have been single, but in the Jewish culture it was expected that the majority of young men would marry fairly early on in life, also it was normal to look after older members of your family who might be living in the same house. So someone must have been supporting them financially, as they still needed food and everyday essentials for themselves and any dependants.

The donkey used on Palm Sunday belonged to a person who was obviously willing to loan it to Jesus for a time, and the upper room used for the Last Supper was in somebody's house. There are so many everyday details that one might overlook on a first reading of the gospel stories, but when you dig deeper there must have been many others behind the scenes helping out. The disciples certainly could not have nipped back to do a bit of fishing at the weekends, or in between journeys, as travel was so much slower in those days with people often having to walk miles to get from one town to another, and Jesus would take them on long journeys, far away from the Sea of Galilee.

There must have been so much going on in the background that we are just not aware of, with many people giving generously of their time, money or belongings. Maybe it is the same today, with all the work that goes on in this church and in the Diocese, not just on Sundays but in the week when not everyone can be around to see what a busy place it is. Who funds all this activity for the church and the community in our present day? Well, you do! But perhaps we do not say often enough how much it is appreciated, or tell you about the wonderful things that we have been able to do because of your generosity.

Later in Matthew's Gospel we can read that Jesus said, "When you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honoured by others. Truly I tell you, they have received

their reward in full. But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.”

This may be why we are careful not to boast about our giving. Or is it that in our heart of hearts we realise that we have not prayed about how much to give and just take out some small change to put in the plate when it goes by? On the other hand we might be really generous, like the widow that Luke’s gospel tells us about. ‘As Jesus looked up, he saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. “Truly I tell you,” he said, “this poor widow has put in more than all the others. All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on.”’

Just for a moment, let us consider more carefully what Jesus said about our Father in heaven seeing what we do in secret and rewarding us. Recently I heard an interesting story, of someone who was so moved by a sermon about God giving his son to die for them, that they spontaneously put an extra £5 in the collection plate. They soon forgot about what they had done, but several weeks later their generosity was rewarded when a member of the church community offered to help them with an expensive home maintenance task that saved them over £100. Was this just a coincidence ,or was it God rewarding them? We may never know, but it is worth thinking about.

Of course we never know how God might choose to reward people. It could be in many different ways and often we might not make the connection, as the time of giving and the timing of the reward could be weeks or months apart. I think what is most important is that we give out of or thankfulness for what God has already done for us, because then we give with no strings attached or expectation of reward. This leaves us free to receive in many different ways and not be disappointed when life still throws problems up for us to cope with.

It is right to put our families high on our list of financial priorities, as many people have elderly relatives to support as well as themselves, or teenagers away at university whose rent they pay while they complete their degree. Circumstances are constantly changing though and it is worth reviewing how our priorities might be different now from what they were when we first became a Christian. As we travel on this exciting journey with Jesus, new opportunities may arise that we had never dreamed of when we began and so it is good to be open to new possibilities for giving time and money for the ministry that each of us has set before us.

It can give you a real buzz to see more and more people coming to know the love of God in their lives and to see their sadness turn to joy, and even more so when you know that what you have given in secret has helped to make that happen. Just a word of warning though: if you are given to acts of spontaneous generosity and are a tax payer, please keep a Gift Aid envelope handy in your pocket. A five pound note can become worth six pounds just by slipping it into one of these envelopes and signing the front, and then even more can be done with your gift.

May God bless us all in our giving and receiving in the coming weeks. Amen.

Kay Dyer

Reader, St Andrew Shottery