

New Beginnings 27.1.08

Bible Reading: Matthew 4: 12-25

Prayer:

Lord, I am poured out – I come to you for renewal.

Lord, I am weary – I come to you for refreshment.

Lord, I am worn – I come to you for restoration.

Lord, I am lost – I come to you for guidance.

Lord, I am troubled – I come to you for peace.

Lord, I am lonely – I come to you for love.

Come, Lord.

Come revive me

Come re-shape me

Come mould me in your image.

Re-cast me in the furnace of your love.

David Adam, quoted by Gerard Kelly in The Six Habits of Highly Connected People, p19

New beginnings.

That's the theme of the passage from Matthew's gospel in Matthew 4: 12-25.

A New Beginning for Jesus as he commences his ministry in Galilee.

New Beginnings for the first disciples, Simon Peter, Andrew, and the brothers, James and John, as they decide to follow Jesus.

New Beginnings for the people who received healing from Jesus.

I am going to try a paraphrase of these themes, bringing the passage into a contemporary context.

Jesus in Hobsons Bay

Jesus returned to Melbourne. He went and lived in Hobsons Bay by the sea. This was to fulfil the prophetic word, 'Land of the western suburbs, the people living out their lives in the dark saw a huge light; on those living in the dark country of death, a light has dawned.'

This prophecy came to life in Hobsons Bay the moment Jesus started preaching, asking people to 'Change your life. God's kingdom is here.'

Early one morning, walking along the Ferguson St. pier in Williamstown, Jesus saw a couple of guys fishing. They were there regularly, every morning. Jesus got into conversation with them about life, about their work, about their families. Then he said, 'Would you like to come with me? I'll make a new kind of fisherman out of you.' Curious, they decided to go with him, and see what would happen.

Along Nelson Place, they dropped into Hobson's Choice for coffee. More conversation followed. Jesus talked with a couple of the café workers about their routine, about the hospitality industry, about what was important to them. As he went to pay for the coffee, he said, 'Would you like to come with me? I'll show you a new kind of service, a different kind of hospitality.' Curious, they also decided to go with him, and see what would happen.

From Williamstown, he went all over Hobsons Bay. He used churches for meeting places and taught people about truth, about a different kind of lifestyle, about how to

make sense of their lives, and about God. His theme was God's kingdom – that like a good government enables a stable, fair and just society to exist, so to come under the rule of God, or the reign of God, enables people to live life according to what is best for them.

As well as the churches, he used all the gathering places possible to be able to meet people and share with them his teaching: libraries; schools; restaurants; the RSL clubs; Probus groups; Rotary; shopping centres; the bowling clubs, golf clubs and sporting venues.

Not only did he teach about a new way of living, he healed people of their illnesses and of the bad effects of their unhealthy lifestyles. Word got around the entire western suburbs. People brought others to him – anyone who had a disorder, illness or addiction – whether mental, emotional or physical. Jesus healed them, one and all.

More and more people came as the momentum increased. They came from the northern suburbs, from the Bible belt and the big churches in the eastern suburbs, somewhat surprised that Jesus had shown up in the west. Curious, they came to see what it all meant.

And the new community of Jesus' followers began.

(Paraphrase based on The Message, Eugene Peterson's paraphrasing translation)

Where would you find Jesus?

Earlier in the service, I asked the question, 'If Jesus came in person now, to whom would he come in Australia? Where would we find him in Hobsons Bay? Where would you find him in your day-by-day life? What would he be doing? What do you think he is saying to you?'

Open up for people to comment and respond to the paraphrase of 'Jesus in Hobsons Bay'.

Listen to Jesus' words:

'Change your life. God's kingdom is here.' *Matt. 4: 17*

'Come, follow me.' *Matt. 4: 19*

'I will make you into a new person with a fresh start.' *Matt. 4: 19*

He asks us to bring his light into the darkness of places of resentment, anger, broken relationships, despair, grief and loss, addiction, boredom – with a word of hope, a deed of kindness. We can all do that.

Take time each day to ask God to help you see, among the people you meet each day, where encouragement is needed. Sometimes we think of mission as a big, grand program with pages and pages of vision and action plans, when what we can do is to start small and let it grow as we gain our confidence in reaching out beyond ourselves. Don't think you have to use spiritual language. Just listen to people. You might respond with something like, 'It sounds like you feel you need a fresh start.' Or, 'Are you needing some help to get through?'

I may not know the answers to someone's drug addictions – but I can offer kindness, practical help and seek out resources and networks that may be of help to someone, if

they want it. The biggest let-down for God is for us to say, 'I **can't** do it.' The biggest disappointment for God is for us to say, 'I **won't** do it.'

Take some risks for God. Just reach out in love. When Jesus calls, he also equips and empowers. The difference for the disciples the day that they 'left their nets and followed Jesus', which is another way of saying that they changed their priorities and values, was that they had Jesus with them. This makes all the difference in daily living. Having Jesus with you. It won't mean the end of your problems. It won't mean a rose-lined path along which to travel.

But it will mean a new beginning. We go through many conversions in the course of following Jesus. Many times we face the need of repentance in our life.

David Bosch, who wrote the monumental book, *Transforming Mission*, which has been so influential in shaping the thinking and practice of the contemporary missional era, wrote: "To become a disciple means a decisive and irrevocable turning to both God and neighbour. What follows from there is a journey which never ends in this life, a journey of continually discovering new dimensions of loving God and neighbour."

Today, there are two opportunities that are before us for new beginnings. One is the new beginning that follows repentance – or changing our life. Turning from a self-centred life to a Jesus-centred life. You may need that today.

The other new beginning is the opportunity to be engaged in a Jesus-centred mission as you decide that you will follow Jesus into the places where he leads you. That you will be available to him to do what he asks you to do in responding to the needs of those around you in your daily life. I think I can hear God saying to us today, 'Don't keep the new beginnings to yourself. There are hundreds of people out there who would love a fresh start in life. Can you bring my light into their life? Be a friend – pray – listen – respond.'

Prayer

In the words of a prayer of a mission worker in the western suburbs of Melbourne, with whom I met during the week -

Father we confess that we often see the overwhelming need, and try to meet it in our own strength, and in our own power. We try to make the kingdom come, without the king. We often neglect both your empowering, and your grace that anticipates a response. Let us come to you in prayer, let us walk in your power, and let us return to our first love. That your justice may reign on earth, and not our own.
Amen.

Resources:

- David Adam, quoted by Gerard Kelly in *The Six Habits of Highly Connected People*, (Spring Harvest 2003 p19)
- My paraphrase of Matthew 4: 12-25 based on *The Message*, Eugene Peterson's paraphrasing translation
- David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*
- Prayer in 'The Dolphin', an email newsletter produced by John Jensen, Footscray Vic.