

Jesus calls us to discipleship and community

INTRODUCING TODAY'S THEME

Today as you know is Australia Day, a day chosen to celebrate the landing of the First Fleet at Sydney Cove in 1788.

To give you a feel for how British, colonial and patriarchal this celebration has been in the past, have a quick look with me at the original four verses of our national anthem, *Advance Australia Fair*, published in 1878.

Australia's sons let us rejoice,
for we are young and free;
we've golden soil and wealth for toil,
our home is girt by sea;
our land abounds in nature's gifts
of beauty rich and rare;
in hist'ry's page, let ev'ry stage
advance Australia fair.

*In joyful strains then let us sing,
advance Australia fair.*

When gallant Cook from Albion sailed,
to trace wide oceans o'er,
true British courage bore him on,
til he landed on our shore.
Then here he raised Old England's flag,
the standard of the brave;
"With all her faults we love her still"
"Britannia rules the wave."

*In joyful strains then let us sing
advance Australia fair.*

While other nations of the globe
behold us from afar,
we'll rise to high renown and shine
like our glorious southern star;
from England soil and fatherland,

Scotia and Erin fair,
let all combine with heart and hand
to advance Australia fair.

*In joyful strains then let us sing
advance Australia fair.*

Should foreign foe e'er sight our coast,
or dare a foot to land,
we'll rouse to arms like sires of yore,
to guard our native strand;
Britannia then shall surely know,
though oceans roll between,
her sons in fair Australia's land
still keep their courage green.

*In joyful strains then let us sing
Advance Australia fair.*

A fifth verse was added at the time of Federation in 1901 that is now the official second verse of our national anthem ...

Beneath our radiant Southern Cross,
we'll toil with hearts and hands;
to make our youthful Commonwealth,
renowned of all the lands;
for those who've come across the seas
we've boundless plains to share;
with courage let us all combine
to advance Australia fair.

*In joyful strains then let us sing
advance Australia fair!*

What is uplifting and what is ironic in this anthem?

Now as an alternative, look with me at some of the lyrics of another song that was popular in my younger days. It's by a band called Goanna and it's called *Solid Rock* ... 1982

Round about the dawn o' time,
when dreaming all began
a crowd o' people came.
They were looking for their promised land
were running from the heart of darkness
searching for the heart o' light.
Well it was their paradise.

*They were standing on solid rock
standing on sacred ground
living on borrowed time
and the winds of change were blowing cold that night*

They were standing on the shore one day,
saw the white sails in the sun.
Wasn't long before they felt the sting,
white man, white law, white gun.
Don't tell me that it's justified, 'cause somewhere, someone lied
yeah, someone lied, someone lied, genocide.
Well someone lied, oh

*And now you're standing on solid rock
standing on sacred ground
living on borrowed time
and the winds of change are blowing down the line*

- What do you notice that's radically different about these two songs?
- What story and what history and what focus does each song give?
- How might we hold these various perspectives together on Australia Day?

Below are two attempts to acknowledge our shared past.

I am Australian Bruce Woodley, Dobe Newton 1987
I came from the dream-time
from the dusty red-soil plains
I am the ancient heart

the keeper of the flame
I stood upon the rocky shores
I watched the tall ships come
For forty thousand years I've been
the first Australian

I came upon the prison ship
bowed down by iron chains
I bought the land, endured the lash
and waited for the rains
I'm a settler, I'm a farmer's wife
on a dry and barren run
A convict, then a free man,
I became Australian

I'm the daughter of a digger
who sought the mother lode
The girl became a woman
on the long and dusty road
I'm a child of the Depression
I saw the good times come
I'm a bushie, I'm a battler
I am Australian

We are one
but we are many
and from all the lands on earth we come
We'll share a dream
and sing with one voice
I am, you are, we are Australian
I'm a teller of stories
I'm a singer of songs
I am Albert Namatjira
and I paint the ghostly gums
I'm Clancy on his horse
I'm Ned Kelly on the run
I'm the one who waltzed Matilda

I am Australian

I'm the hot wind from the desert
I'm the black soil of the plain
I'm the mountains and the valleys
I'm the drought and flooding rains
I am the rock
I am the sky
the rivers when they run
the spirit of this great land
I am Australian

We are one
but we are many
and from all the lands on earth we come
We'll share a dream
and sing with one voice
I am, you are, we are Australian

Stolen Words by Hot Potato Band 2016

Summers gone, Winters here. Autumns far and Spring is near.
The sea is rough the sky is blue.
I'm waiting for change and I'm waiting on you.
They've stolen Gen and lied to me.
They've broken lives and our history.
... So come on, come on, come on and show me what you've done.
We're many and we stand Australian.

Well, this stolen land of hope and greed,
set aside for a white fantasy.
Three lions from the West,
planted their flags and beat their chest.
My forefathers were from abroad.
Set sail and came ashore,
... they became Australian.
So come on, come on. Come on and show me what you've done.
We're many and we stand Australian.

Read: [Ps 27:1, 4-9, 14](#) [Matthew 4:12-22](#)

As we've already mentioned, today is the day we call **Australia Day**, when we celebrate the many blessings we enjoy in this great country – our climate, our beautiful landscape, a mostly peaceful and multi-cultural society, a high standard of living. There is so much that we have to be thankful for in Australia – the place we call home.

Yet today is not a day of celebration for our indigenous brothers and sisters. For them it is a **day of mourning** – which is why we held a service of lament and mourning last Sunday. Indigenous people sometimes call the day **Invasion Day** – and remember the brutal violence of the European colonisers and settlers and the dispossession of their tribal lands and culture.

So is today a day to celebrate or a day to mourn?

That all depends on your perspective ...

Just like the perspective of Jesus in today's Gospel reading when he hears about the arrest of John the Baptist for publicly criticising King Herod's marriage arrangements. His perspective is probably very different to yours or mine... we would probably not take John's arrest as a sign that now was the time to begin a new religious reform movement in Capernaum, just a few kilometres from King Herod's military headquarters.

We also might not have chosen to begin such a movement by deliberately taking over John's mantra – 'Repent for the kingdom of heaven has come near'. And we might have chosen a different crew to build our movement around – perhaps choosing people with better **connections** or more **experience** in the role.

But from Jesus' perspective, the place, the timing, the place and the people were just right. Confrontation with the religious authorities would come later, his message would build on John's message but go in a different direction, and the people he chose – well – let's say that Jesus had different criteria than we often apply.

The focus of the passage falls on Jesus' calling of the first disciples – all four of whom are fishermen – Simon Peter and his brother Andrew, and James and John.

The text says that Jesus saw them while he was walking along the edge of Lake Galilee and called them to follow him, saying 'I will make you fishers of people'.

I wonder what Jesus **saw** in these four?

Did he see working class people without status, qualifications or religious experience?

Or did he see resilient and teachable people – people of potential having hidden but profound gifts?

As I look around the congregation here this morning, I'm reminded of Paul's words to the Corinthian church that not many of them were powerful, not many were of noble birth, not many were considered people of great wisdom. But, Paul writes, God delights to work through ordinary, weak and even foolish people. God continues to work through such ordinary people today – people just like us.

Jesus calls these four to follow him. Again, I wonder what **they** saw in Jesus ... I'm sure there's more to this story than we're told. The Gospel of Luke places this story later in Jesus' ministry when he was already well known and adds a story about a miraculous catch of fish. The Gospel of John suggests there was conversation between John the Baptist and at least Andrew and Simon Peter before they met Jesus, pointing out Jesus as someone sent by God and therefore worth checking out. But however it happened, Jesus was obviously pretty persuasive and the four fishermen were ready for a change in life direction. Even so it was a major step to take.

The four friends will later be named as **disciples** – which means **learners** or **apprentices**. Exactly what this entails remains to be seen, but the initial hook is that Jesus will teach them to be fishers of people. While this may sound alarming to our ears, I suspect it's a playful way for Jesus to connect with their background – 'I'll take the fishing skills you've honed over many years but direct them towards people. As fishermen, you know the habits of fish really well – where they're found, how to approach them without scaring them off, how helpless they are, how they might be netted. I want to show you how to understand and connect with **people** and their needs and help bring them into God's kingdom.'

I suspect they had little idea of where this decision would eventually take them, but they saw an opportunity for adventure and a different sort of community. What

matters is that they were willing to take the risk and step out into the unknown with Jesus. This was a decisive step but there would be many more challenges and decisions ahead of them as they continued to walk with Jesus. Similarly for us, there may have been one decisive moment when we decided to follow Jesus, but this step is just one on the lifelong journey of being a disciple of Jesus.

I wonder what your response is to hearing this well known story. Do you find it inspiring, or perhaps reckless or more likely threatening? When God calls people in the Scriptures, the usual human response is to make excuses – I'm too old, I'm too young, I can't speak well, choose someone else. To these we might add 'I'm too busy right now', or 'I've got other responsibilities'. These are all natural responses when we sense that Jesus – or God – might be calling us to something new, something risky or something with an uncertain outcome.

But rather than make excuses, I'd like to suggest some better ways of applying this passage to our lives, both as individuals and as communities.

Jesus' first call is to repent and place our lives within the kingdom of God.

This is not a one-off response but a call to ongoing relationship with God. Jesus' call is to **deepen** that relationship – to come to worship **expecting** to meet with God and to hear a word from God, to **listen to** God in our times of quiet prayer, and to **learn** God's ways and heartbeat through meditating on Scripture every day. If we take Jesus as our model and example, this is how Jesus lived, spending time – every day – communing with God.

As we do this more and more, we'll start to see the people and situations around us as Jesus sees them. When Jesus saw Peter, Andrew, James and John I think he saw people of courage, perseverance and potential. He also saw people he could **equip** so that they could take over the new movement when he was no longer there. As older folk, one of our callings might be to look for these and similar qualities in others, especially in younger people we meet, and to deliberately look out for people who might take over the mantle of leadership from us.

The second call is to be willing to follow Jesus, where he leads us, every day.

This will be different to the first disciples who physically travelled around from village to village with Jesus, but in other ways it will be similar. Like them, we are called to be bearers of the good news, to point people to Jesus, and to help bring healing and wholeness to others.

Where will this happen? Some of it will happen in the church of course, but it also happens in our homes, at the places we volunteer and work, at the shops, at school and many other places. What sorts of people does Jesus hang out with and welcome? Where do we find them ... and so where is Jesus already active in our community?

How does it happen? It happens as we hear and respond to God's small quiet voice calling us to talk to that person over there, pray with this one or be involved with that group. It happens as we open our eyes to see Jesus in the other person and take a moment or three to ponder what would Jesus do in this situation or say to this person.

All of this applies to church communities just as much as to individuals. Jesus was not a solo operator for God's kingdom but right from the outset was intentional about building a new community and making new connections between people. While we might feel most comfortable sticking with the fishing nets we know and the old boats we have grown accustomed to, Jesus calls to us to follow him into new places and to try new things ... for Croydon folk it might mean building bridges with folk at ElishaCare or volunteering with Playgroup or Helping Hand ... for Croydon North folk it might mean attending or volunteering at the art program or Tuesday meals.

For those who find it difficult to read the Bible or pray alone, there's a small study group that meets on the second and fourth Thursdays of the month at 1.30 down at Croydon. The group has people from both Croydon and Croydon North attending. At present we're working our way through that most famous piece of Jesus' teaching – the Sermon on the Mount – that will be featuring in the Lectionary starting from next week. Everyone is welcome to come and share your wisdom and insights and learn from others.

Our next gathering is on Thursday 13 February.

The invitation for all of us today is to choose to respond to Jesus' call to follow him. This will always have an element of the unknown but also the element of adventure. We don't walk alone – we go in the company of Jesus – as ordinary people – living ordinary lives – and yet doing extraordinary things in partnership with Jesus.