



Third Week Ordinary Time 2005

Isaiah 8: 23- 9: 3 1 Corinthians 1: 10-17 Matthew 4: 12-23

Light surrounds us even if shadow abounds.

God is the God of Joy and we should rejoice as people do when the harvest is brought in.

These hopeful and encouraging words of Isaiah are part of the passage quoted by Matthew when he begins the story of Jesus' ministry.

We live in a time when the signs of harvest with its residue of empty paddocks and stripped vines are echoed by the destruction of a deadly harvest caused by the natural disaster we have experienced. Where once was laughter and play now is ruin.

Every ending prefigures a new beginning. Our humanity is most engaged by the suffering of our brothers and sisters. This is a universal call which we have sometimes allowed ourselves to ignore.

Into such a situation in his own time Jesus moves, as he begins his ministry. As he walks the sands of Galilee he begins the shaping of the kingdom mission. He begins with people; ordinary people going about their everyday work, but people who are not so preoccupied that they can't be surprised by the movement of the Spirit.

Jesus interrupts or cut across their work. "Come here, join me become a fisher of people. Jesus invited them to use their skills for a new purpose. It's not recorded but to Matthew the tax collector he might have said, "Come use your accounting skills for the kingdom." Jesus knows that the work demands a variety of skills and so the contribution of many is to be valued.

The action of God in our lives has this quality of surprise. We are taken unawares. Matthew wants to show how the Christian community arises, grows and is sustained. Jesus looks for companionship in his ministry. Community is the model of ministry. Start with family, or friends let the circle grow- this is very different from the model many adopt in evangelising where numbers of the baptised are more important than the commitment of the individual. The call to the two pairs of brothers provides an example of how an invitation is offered in freedom. It is not a divine call if there is no freedom to accept or reject the call.

Where the gospel is proclaimed some people will hear it as good news, a message that frees from all that binds them. Others will hear a call to be part of bringing the message to others.

The call of Peter, Andrew, James and John *at the water* recalls Jesus' baptism and how Matthew sees the relationship between God and Jesus. The relationship is one of obedience, that is, the attentive listening, being tuned in the ordinary daily journey to the presence of God. To know the will of God is to discern the way forward in a community of disciples as Jesus promised, *where two or more are gathered in my name I am with you*. Give us today our daily bread is also a reminder that yesterdays solutions to issues will not always be adequate for today.

The reading from Corinthians illustrates problems that can affect the community. Paul warns us of the dangers of allowing divisions to grow into *parties*. Differences of opinion and practice are normal but they must not be used as an excuse for building fences. A listening heart is the core of obedience.

Paul warns that our whole understanding of the meaning of Christ for the world will be lost if divisions are allowed to grow unchecked. As we begin this year we can resolve to make a conscious effort to act as healer and peacemaker where we can.

To enjoy the harvest means we have laboured and our labour is the cultivation of mature communities based on promoting individual growth, fairness and respect for the dignity of all.

Patricia Stevenson rsj.