

Dear Friends,

It looks as though we're going to be living with restrictions for a while yet so I shall be keeping up with these letters for the foreseeable future. Best wishes to all during this new lockdown period.

This week's gospel reading is part of John's account of the call of the first disciples. We see different reactions to the call of Jesus. We see Philip respond and follow Jesus immediately. We also see a very different response from Nathanael who provocatively asks, "Can anything good come from Nazareth?"

Following is a very personal thing, it's a choice we make. Following is a voluntary act, it isn't a compulsory one, no-one forces you to follow in a certain way. Following is very different from being frogmarched, with a gun against your head - then you don't get any choice. Following is voluntary, it's a choice; if you follow a football team, that's your choice, no-one forces you to.

It's an individual and personal decision, no-one else can make the decision for you. When we're young our parents make a lot of decisions for us. As we get older so we take more and more decisions ourselves, we take more responsibility for our lives. The decision whether or not to follow Jesus is a decision we have to make for ourselves, no-one else can make it for us.

Following Jesus also means doing something about it and not just talking about it. Sometimes we're good at talking about things, we're often better about talking than we are about doing. If we have a job to do we can spend ages and ages planning it and go into great detail to sort it out properly. We look at it from every conceivable angle, we consult anyone and everyone we know who might have an opinion or an idea that might be relevant. Sometimes we may end up doing nothing at all. By the time we've had a few meetings we've lost interest, or we may even forget what we were supposed to be doing in the first place.

When Jesus spoke to the first disciples he called them there and then. There wasn't time to have a long debate about it, to think carefully and weigh up all the pros and cons. The fishermen didn't spend ages planning how their families were going to cope without them or sort out who was going to take over their work.

When God calls to us he wants us to do something about it, not just to hear, but to respond. When Jesus called the first disciples he didn't say, "I have this new theological system I'd like to discuss with you". He didn't say, "I have this new way of life I'd like to debate with you". He simply said, "Come with me, follow me". When we're called by God we aren't called to a debate or a discussion, we're called to action.

Best wishes,

Mark