

**SERMON PREACHED AT ST ANDREW'S WALKERVILLE, SUNDAY OCTOBER 8,
2017, BY THE REVEREND HELEN GIBSON-WHITE, ASSOCIATE PRIEST**

FIFTEENTH SERMON IN THE SERIES ABOUT THE HOLY COMMUNION SERVICE

THE SENDING OUT OF GOD'S PEOPLE

APBA Page 143, #30

At the beginning of the service of Holy Communion, on page 119 of *An Australian Prayer Book* that we use here at St Andrew's, we "Gathered in God's Name." We came to the high point of our worship when we received the bread and wine. Now we are being sent out.

Jesus' predominant word was "Come." Now it is "Go." We must come to Jesus in order to be prepared to go out.

Jesus called the first disciples to follow him, and he still calls people. By the very fact that we have come together this morning we can assume that Jesus has called us, or is calling us. Jesus called his disciples individually as he calls people today; but he does not call us only into a private relationship with him. He called his followers then, and calls his followers now into community – as the church, the Body of Christ.

He called the first disciples so that they could learn from him and eventually come to know who he is, in order that they could carry on his work after he left them. He calls us to do the same – to know him so that we can make him known. Even when that original group of disciples let him down and scattered when he needed them most, he still loved them. Jesus never gave the slightest indication that he regretted the moment on the beach or in the tax office when he said, "Come ... follow me." That says to us that he does not regret calling us, whatever each of us has made, or failed to make, of our calling to this point of our lives.

Before Jesus ascended, he gave his disciples the assurance that he would never leave them ... he would be with them in his Holy Spirit. He knew that they could not succeed in their strength alone, so he told them to wait for the Holy Spirit to enable them. Nor can we succeed in carrying out Jesus' work in our strength alone. We, too, have his presence to enable us.

The prayers for the "**Sending Out of God's People**" on page 143 of *An Australian Prayer Book* give us great deal of encouragement. Here are some examples:- "In this sacrament you assure us of your goodness and love. Accept our sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving, and help us grow in love and obedience." (Page 143 Prayer a.) Then, may we who have reached out our hands to receive this sacrament be strengthened in your service ..." (Page 143 Prayer b.) And, "In this holy meal you fill us with new hope. May the power of your love which we have known in word and sacrament continue your saving work among us, give us courage for our pilgrimage, and bring us to the joys you promise." (Page 143 Prayer c.) And again, "May we who share Christ's body live his risen life; we who drink his cup bring life to others; we whom the Spirit lights

give light to the world.” (Page 144 Prayer d.). The purpose and end point of these prayers is that “the whole earth live to your praise your name.” (Page 144 Prayer d.).

The call to follow must precede our going out, and our going out is our response.

Maybe we tend to think of Jesus’ call as being in the same way that he called Peter, Andrew, James and John. One moment they were attending to their daily vocation ; the next instant all that bread-winning work was given up and life took on a completely new direction. The call was sudden and unexpected. Maybe that indicates a tendency to put religion in one shoe box, and our work and daily life into another. But working and following are not different things. Millions of people follow Jesus in their daily work. Maybe you can name a time or a situation when you were first aware of Jesus’ call, or it may be a deep and enduring awareness of something that’s always been there in your life. But having answered the call in whatever way it came, how do we take the next step, moving from Jesus’ “come” to his “go”? What are we sent out for? What are we sent out to do?

I mean this in a practical sense as it applies to us in this parish (while acknowledging that God can lead us in ways that we have not yet dreamed of). While we at St Andrew’s support overseas and local missions, our individual mission is usually to be worked out here, in our homes, in our community, in our workplace, in our social or parish life. In these areas we need to be prepared to tell our faith story.

Aldous Huxley the writer, philosopher and humanist, was (I have read) spending a few days away with a group of friends. Sunday came, and one of the group who was known to be a committed Christian, prepared to go to church. Huxley said to him, “Say if you don’t go to church today, but stay and tell me why you are a Christian and what Jesus means to you.” The man replied that he couldn’t do that because he could never win an argument with Huxley. Huxley said, “I don’t want to argue with you. I just want you to tell me, simply, why you are a Christian.” So the man stayed and told Huxley quietly and in simple terms why he was a Christian and what Jesus meant to him. When he had finished Huxley said, “I would give anything if I could believe that.”

We are not responsible for results, but we are responsible for effort. Herbert O’Driscoll (Irish-born Anglican thinker and scholar, resident in Canada) in *Prayers For The Breaking Of Bread*, makes an interesting point – it is that when Jesus calls us to proclaim the good news to all the world, we picture vast throngs of people and far-away countries. He says that these are the images that Satan used to tempt Jesus in the wilderness. Satan showed Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world.”

Jesus rejected that and chose a very different scale – not the vast panorama but the little world of the lakeside and the first two people to whom he said, “Come ... follow me.” Jesus opted for beginning in the immediate context of his own life and experience.

Surely this says something to us, something to our being “sent out.” We, by tradition and largely by temperament, are never going to be committed to mass evangelism. But we need not feel that this is a lack; it is simply not our gift. But there is nothing

in the world to stop us from cultivating the ability to speak to people simply, honestly and naturally about our Christian faith and our church. Surveys have shown that eight out of ten people have returned to the church because someone has done just that.

Seen in this way the “sending-out of God’s people” is not daunting. As O’Driscoll said, the most productive way for us to be “sent” is pictured in the first chapter of John’s gospel. Andrew, a follower of John the Baptist, is drawn towards Jesus and then goes to Peter, and with the very simple and significant words, “brought him to Jesus.” The same thing, when Philip brings Nathaniel with the words, “Come and see.”

As we are sent out, let us be willing to tell, in very simple ways, our own faith story, so that others may want to “come and see.”