

## Following Jesus

Dear Friends,

Many of you will be familiar with the story of Jesus calling his disciples Andrew, Peter, James, and John. According to Matthew, Mark, and Luke these men were fishermen who very quickly left behind their occupations and families to follow Jesus wherever he was going to take them.

What does this story say to us? The first thing I see in it is that these fishermen had not been looking around to find someone to follow. Jesus just appeared out of the blue and chose them. I see in this the fact that we do not choose God: God chooses us. We might even say that God has chosen us from the very beginning of our lives in that God is our creator: God has chosen to give us our life. As we are God's creatures, there is something in us that wants to respond to our creator. Some people have described this as a God-shaped hole in our spiritual being, a hole that only God can fill. In his *Confessions* Saint Augustine put it another way when, writing about God and us, he said that 'our hearts are restless until they find their rest in you.'

On the other hand, God has given us free will. This means that we are free to reject Jesus whenever he calls us. We are not God's puppets. Those fishermen could have refused to follow Jesus. Instead of responding to God's call, we all too often live according to what we want to do. And there are, of course, a lot of voices out there saying, 'Follow me.' The world is full of all sorts of inviting voices, many of which would lure us into a cul-de-sac and leave us robbed and wounded, if not dead.

Maybe our human make-up is such that we have to be lured down a cul-de-sac and suffer the grievous consequences before we can hear Jesus' call. One thing that makes his call different from all the others is that God in Jesus never gives up on us. When everyone else has left us and we find ourselves lying wounded and half-dead at the end of a dark cul-de-sac Jesus will always be there, if we can only open our eyes, look up at the stars, be still, and know that this world and us, however flawed we are, is not an evil place, for it has been created by a loving God to be a place of love.

When, in whatever way it comes about, we finally hear Jesus' welcoming, healing, life-giving voice and respond by getting up, brushing ourselves off, and following him, we find that we are embarked on a radical new adventure. Look at how much those fishermen's lives were changed by following Jesus. Although most Christians are not called to leave home and family behind, being a follower of Jesus should make a radical change in our lives, for what is more radical than seeking in all sincerity to love other people in the same way that we love ourselves? It is scary; but it is also life-giving, both to others and to ourselves, for it is what God created us to do, if we can but hear his call and follow his Son, knowing that God's grace and strength will enable us to carry out this radical work he created us to do.

Yours in Christ,  
Charles Brown