



Parkwood Herald News Flash² March 2021

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Further message from David Harris:-

**Jesus calls his first disciples.
Mark Chapter 1; verses 14-20**

Were you ever part of a 'youth group'? I was.

- **Literally involved with a 'group.'**

When I should have been doing my 'A' levels, a group of us formed a local 'pop' group. Because I couldn't sing or play an instrument, I became the Manager! My main qualification was that we had a telephone at home because of my Dad's job! We were literally a 'group' of friends touring round in a battered old van, playing at such prestige venues as Rawmarsh Baths Hall, the Parson Cross Hotel, the local YMCA, as well as many church youth clubs. But we were, first and foremost, a 'group' of young lads- really enjoying being together and being part of the music scene- if only within South Yorkshire!

- **Church youth group**

The other main 'youth group' I was a part of was our church youth group. A part of this obviously involved links with our local church, and it was the main social group I was part of in my teens. We seemed to do everything together- meeting in each other's homes; going to parties; first boyfriends and girlfriends; and being there for each other when things

were going well and also when things were difficult. Many people talk fondly about their church youth group. At Greenhill church, where I am now a member, a number of people in my age group speak fondly about the church youth groups they were part of in South Sheffield. Like me, they can remember the names and details of each member of their group, and talk about things they did together as if they happened last week. Many of us have benefitted from, and have fond memories of, being in a YOUTH GROUP, which may or not have had links to a church, or just a group of friends growing up together and doing the kind of daft things that teenagers do!

- **Jesus and His Youth Group!**

At the start of the first lockdown, a friend gave me a book to read. You know how it is- it was one of those books that I put on one side to read 'when I have time.' A few weeks ago, I finally managed to look at it. It is called 'Unleashed' by Gavin and Anne Calver, and there is a short section entitled, 'Jesus and His Youth Group.' The very simple point they make is one I hadn't thought about before. They suggest that Jesus' twelve disciples were young, almost all under the age of 18, and some even as young as 15! At that time, young men married after the age of 18, and Peter was the only one known to be married- his mother-in-law is referred to! The rest appear to have been unmarried teenage

lads. At the time Jesus called them to follow he was about 30, so his first followers would have been a generation younger.

These young men would not have been well travelled, and had probably spent most of their lives till that point in their village or small town. Yet, here they were leaving to travel with a man they hardly



knew, to- *who knows where!* It might be similar to a young person today, saying;

- *'Dad/ Mum, I am going backpacking for a couple of years- but don't worry, I'll be fine!'*
- *'But who are you going with?'*
- *'There will be a group of us, and the bloke in charge is somebody we've just met.'*

No wonder Zebedee was a bit fed up- and concerned- when this man turned up and persuaded his two lads to just leave the family business and follow him. It's a fascinating picture. A 30 year old Rabbi travelling round the country with a group of teenage lads- **Jesus and His Youth Group!**

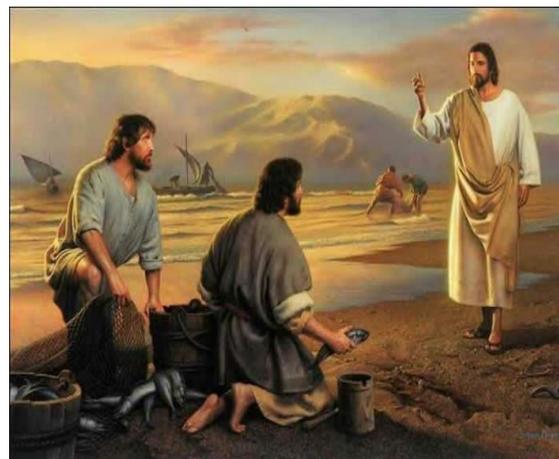
For a short period in my twenties, I worked as a youth leader. I was 'persuaded' to take a group of teenage boys for a week to Butlins. It was an awful experience for me, although they loved it. Trying to keep tabs on the group was a bit like herding cats. On more than one occasion I was made to feel completely useless when a couple of the teenagers were brought back to me by a member of Butlins security, asking if I was supposed to be in charge!

Now, I am not directly comparing Jesus and his Youth Group to my taking a group of teenagers to Butlins, but it would have been quite a responsibility. Even 'specially chosen' youngsters will have their moments. Surely it would have been easier if Jesus had chosen people with a bit more maturity- formed a committee of people with some experience of mounting a religious campaign; people who really understood what they were letting themselves in for.

I find it reassuring that Jesus chose young, inexperienced, still developing, teenagers to be his first followers. They would sometimes be hot-headed (think of Peter!); they would sometimes argue and fall out; they would vie with each other about who was most important. It's what teenagers do!

But, Jesus was not looking for perfect, experienced, well rounded individuals to join him. Then, as now, he uses people just as they are- imperfect; still developing; making mistakes and learning from them; but committed to being alongside people and seeking to find a better path through life. The invitation to Simon, Andrew, James and John was to put aside their fishing nets and start 'fishing for people.'

And partly because they weren't yet weighed down with spouses, financial commitments and other responsibilities, they were able to....



- Respond Immediately

Immediacy seems to be a concept that is referred to many times in the gospels. Just within the 7 verses we are looking at today;

- 'They immediately left their nets and followed him' (Mark Chapter 1 verse 18)
- 'And immediately he called them.' (verse 20)

Were these young men foolhardy, or far-sighted, or both?

It takes a lot of courage to respond without hesitation. Many of us have made some hasty decisions that we have lived to regret; as well as acting impulsively about something that turned out to be the right thing. Young people are sometimes particularly prone to acting impulsively;

- Did Marcus Rashford act impulsively, putting his football career at risk, by speaking out against the government's policy on child poverty?
- Did the 32 year old Justin Welby act impulsively when he turned his back on a highly paid career in the Oil Industry to train as a priest?

I am sure you can think of many more examples. The first followers appear to have acted impulsively. They responded immediately when Jesus called them. Maybe this was just the typical impulsiveness of youth, but the disciples were embarking upon a new way of life; a change in direction.

Many people today have had to re-think the direction they thought their lives would take as a result of the pandemic. Some lost the jobs they held at the beginning of 2020; some had hopes and plans for their futures that have had to be put on hold; some have had to take on new challenges that they had never previously considered. Were the disciples being irresponsible - leaving their stable jobs for the uncertainty of following Jesus? Or, do

we commend them for their unhesitating commitment to follow Jesus?

If being impulsive can be seen as an exciting thing to do, hesitation can sometimes be seen as a less attractive quality. Perhaps it is a sign that someone is unable to make a decision, to make up their mind, or to spend too much time assessing the options before making a decision.

The well known saying, 'He/she who hesitates is lost,' is often used to persuade someone to get on with it, stop hesitating, and make a decision.

The first disciples appeared to have responded *immediately*- without hesitation- to Jesus' invitation to follow him. Maybe they should have hesitated enough to sensibly weigh up all the options and to consult first with family and friends. I am certainly not advocating that we should always rush into things without careful thought-and sometimes, hesitation before making a decision is the right thing to do. The emphasis in Jesus' calling, however, is on the immediacy, even the urgency, or sharing the good news as widely as possible

'The time has come' said Jesus (verse 15) - the time to act unhesitatingly. The Greek word used for time here is **KAIROS**, which means the *right time*, or even *crisis moment*. It is time to move, to get on with it, now is the time.

Jesus has a **CRUCIAL** message to share. God's kingdom is about to dawn! He picks up on the message of John the Baptist before he was thrown into prison, when he told the crowds, 'The time has come' (verse 15). These impulsive young followers of Jesus show those of us who are (just) a bit older something that is very important;

- There **IS** a time to carefully consider what we are being asked to do, before rushing in,
- But, there is also a time to act-unhesitatingly, immediately, and without delay.

