

Homily – 26 January 2020 – The Right Reverend Cameron Venables

Seventy-seven local government elections are held in Queensland every four years and the count-down this year has begun because the 28th March election day is now nine weeks away. The familiar smiling faces of serving Councillors will appear on signs and in Facebook feeds, together with the new faces of people seeking election for the first time. Each candidate will articulate what they believe needs to have priority over the next four years and these will include social cohesion, economic development, water management and infrastructure. The candidates will not ask us to follow them, because they are not religious gurus, but they will ask for our vote! They will ask for the opportunity to serve and lead and make a difference for good.

In response we will have to make assessment of each person and platform. Is this person credible? Have they got the capacity and integrity to work with others to deliver good outcomes over the next four years? And, are the things that they name the areas we deeply want to see prioritised? The things we think will best enable the flourishing of the community and region we are part of...

Supporters of these people will wear matching T-Shirts that may have an image of the candidate's face, and a tag line that says something of what they're about. They'll hand-out leaflets in shopping centres and be ready to answer questions about why they think their candidate is worthy of our confidence, and our vote, and, good on them for getting out there to drum up awareness and support!

If we had to identify a political platform for Jesus, I think the description of him reading from the scroll of Isaiah has much to draw from. The writer of Luke's Gospel remembers Jesus saying, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour..." (Luke 4:18-19). The potential for T-shirts is huge! I imagine the text could read, 'Anointed by God to bring Good News! Freedom! Healing! and Hope!' But, I'm not in marketing and recognise that others could craft a pithier message!

In the Gospel reading today we hear about Jesus calling some fishermen to follow him. He was not asking for their vote, or their support, he was asking them to be part of the team that would make good news, freedom, healing, and hope possible. They were regular working people like you and I, with all the normal things of family and business going on, and Jesus asked them to follow him. Matthew's Gospel tells us that after calling them, they immediately left their nets, their boats, and their father to follow him.

I don't think it would have been a surprise to their families. I imagine those men and their families talking about the developing ministry of Jesus in the previous days and weeks and the growing sense of excitement there would have been among them about his teaching, his healing, and about him as a person. Could he be the one promised by God through the prophets they would have wondered? Could he be the one who would make all the difference in the world? Into that wondering space Jesus came and invited them to 'wear the T-shirt' and be part of his team. They left, and I imagine them leaving with the blessing and support of their families.

In this first month of 2020 it's good to be reminded of the call Jesus gave to those first disciples on

the shores of Lake Galilee and their positive response. It's good because the call from Jesus to follow continues to this day. Many of us have responded through the formal services of Baptism and Confirmation, but the call to follow is every day. We are not called to 'wear the T-shirt' for nine weeks of an election campaign, we are called to follow Christ each day of our lives.

Sometimes we made a decision to follow Christ many years ago and the freshness of first love has become jaded or faded. In that circumstance it's important to ask for a renewing of God's Spirit and this can be done in private prayer, or in prayer with another. Sometimes it's hard to find the right words to express what we believe and why and I'm encouraged and challenged by the exhortation found in the first letter of Peter which suggests, 'in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have. But do this with gentleness and respect...' (NIV 1Peter 3:15-16). Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope you have...

If somebody asked you or me tomorrow, why we believed in a loving God when there was so much brokenness in the world - how would we answer? And, if somebody asked us what difference it made in our lives to have faith in Christ - how would we answer? Maybe ask these questions of yourself this week and write a response to see how you would express things. Maybe ask someone you respect and trust to respond to these questions and learn from them. I think each of these activities would help us be better prepared to articulate the reason for the hope we have. In the same way that Jesus said to those fishermen long ago, 'Come, follow me!' he calls us to be bearers of good news, bringers of hope, and agents of healing...

Let's pray...

Holy God we give thanks for life and love, and for the call of Christ to follow each day. Through your Spirit may our lives find meaning and purpose in responding to that call, and in your grace may you use our little lives to bring blessing..

Amen.