

Collect, Readings and Reflection for 25 January 2026, 3rd Sunday of Epiphany

Collect (*the Church's prayer for today*):

God of all mercy,
your Son proclaimed good news to the poor,
release to the captives,
and freedom to the oppressed:
anoint us with your Holy Spirit
and set all your people free
to praise you in Christ our Lord. Amen.

Readings: *Isaiah 9:1-4; Matthew 4:12-23*

Today's reflection is by Reader Pete Gillions. Jesus begins to preach.

We are looking at Jesus calling his disciples and hoping to see how that is relevant to each of us today. To begin let us consider a more expected response to Jesus.

“ As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” And immediately they said unto Him “Not now. Can’t you see we are busy? We are at work right now because we have bills to pay. Pop back later – much later - when we are finished and maybe then we can have a chat.”

Surely that is just the response you would expect? You don't just walk away from not only your work but your previous life because someone calls to you “Come follow me”. But Matthew tells us that is exactly what the disciples did. So how can we make sense of that, and importantly, see what it is saying to us today. First we need to see that huge changes that happen over time, for example fifty years the attitude towards women, towards gay people and toward people of a different skin colour was radically different to what they are now. Domestic violence was largely unreported, and when it was reported little was done. Racial chants at football grounds were the norm. Gay and black people were often subject to violent attacks while the police not only looked away but sometimes were actually involved themselves. How we see things in 2026 is very different to how we saw things in 1976. It is far from perfect now but it is very different to back then.

So to make sense of this gospel passage we have to recognise that there is a huge, huge distance between us now and them then, not only in time but in culture. We need to try to step back, to step into the lives of Peter and Andrew to try to see why responded to Jesus in the way they did. To help with that is a discovery made about 40 years ago. During a drought, when the waters of the Sea of Galilee receded, two brothers found something in the mud. Archaeologists were called and the discovered it was the remains a 2000 year-old fishing boat. It was painstakingly removed and is now on

display in a museum. What strikes you is how small it is, about 28" long and 8'wide. And what they discovered was that the boat had been repeatedly repaired over a working life of around 80 years.

The boat tells us fishermen made a living but never made enough to replace the boat very often. The boat itself would pass down generations until it was beyond repair, then they would salvage what they could to reuse on the new boat. Peter and Andrew would have learnt their trade and inherited their boat from their father. They would hope to pass it on to their sons. Walking away from their boat which was so much a part of their identity is a very strange thing to do. We need to dig a little deeper.

Peter and Andrew were living in a time of great hope and expectation. Hope that the long-promised Messiah would come and liberate the land of Israel from Roman occupation. John the Baptist had fanned the smouldering embers of this hope into a flame. His criticism of the authorities had landed him in prison. But he had put the prophetic word out – the time was now, repent, be baptised. And when Jesus came for baptism John had pointed to Jesus as the longed-for Messiah. And Jesus steps into that role, as it says '*From that time on Jesus began to preach, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."*' Knowing how the hopes and expectations were focussed on this one man, Jesus, we can begin to see why Peter and Andrew and the other disciples responded so dramatically. This was their moment. A moment not to be missed. So they left their nets and followed Him.

But what does the call of Jesus to follow Him mean to each of us today? Perhaps the first thing, and the most surprising thing, is to realise that God calls each of us. He calls us into relationship through the Risen Christ that by His Spirit we may know something of His love for us. I know that this can be a struggle for some of us to take on board. It is as if when Jesus cast his net over all humanity and all the great and the good are caught in it somehow your little toe has got caught. And Jesus looks at you with surprise and say, 'Well since you're here you might as well stay' That is never the case. We are each called and deeply loved.

Secondly in response to the call of Jesus, we need to ask God to show us what it is we are called to do. God has gifted you in specific ways, ask him to guide you. You are not alone in this - God gives his spirit. Whatever you do, don't try to copy someone else, God made you you. Usually something that reflects who you are and what you are about. And for me that is not joining the music group.

Finally, we must ask for His help and guidance as we go through life and in my experience often this comes through others. We are not on a solitary journey but in a community of faith called to "*watch over one another in love*".

Just a few days ago here in Church was the funeral of Adrienne Hoggard. She died aged 90 and was a long-standing member of this Church. I found it humbling as I listening to what was said about her. And quite simply I realised she exemplified what it means to follow the call of Jesus. On one level her biography might appear unremarkable. Aged 20, having trained as a nurse she returned home after her father's death to support her

mother. And there Adrienne stayed for many decades, working at Cookridge hospital. She never married. But there is another dimension. In his sermon Jonathan described her like this:

Adrienne quietly, persistently held others before God. She prayed for people because she loved people. And she loved people because she loved God. Adrienne had a way of carrying others — their joys, their worries, their families, their stories — as if each one were entrusted to her care. She remembered everything. Birthdays. Grandchildren's names. Where you grew up. Who you were connected to. She could weave a web of friendship out of the thinnest thread. People mattered to her. More than things. More than comfort. More than ease.

Her life was full of service: nursing at Cookridge, caring for Edith, Brown Owl to generations of Brownies, ferrying friends to appointments, belonging to the WI, the Trefoil Guild, Horsforth Churches Together, the Live at Home group, honorary member of the Metcalfe family. And even in the nursing home, she became a kind of chaplain-in-residence.

But beneath all of that activity was something deeper: a trust in the One who remembers us even more faithfully than Adrienne remembered others.

Adrienne was Brown Owl to generations of Brownies. The pack met in the Scout Hut and the family chose that all donations should go to the current users of the Scout Hut, the Horsforth Shed. And earlier this week there was another generation of cubs and brownies coming along to do a woodwork activity in that same building where Adrienne has served. It felt as if the baton had been passed on.

At St James', we are the beneficiaries of all who have gone before us. And we are each called. We are each called to know Gods love and His hand guiding us through life. And called to be faithful to pass the baton on to those who follow after us.

Amen