

CAN WE CHANGE OUR WAY OF LIVING?

When Jesus began his public ministry of preaching and healing, John the Baptist had already been arrested, putting an end to his movement of religious revival. At that point, instead of going back to Nazareth (i.e., instead of going home), Jesus went to Capernaum. This marked a new beginning, whose purpose is described in a verse of prophecy: “The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and for those who lived in the land of the shadow of death, light has dawned.” Jesus would later refer to himself as the light of the world; and, in commissioning his disciples, he would tell send us out also, to be light to the world. His vocation is our vocation too.

In times past the idea of “vocation” was focused mainly on doctors, nurses, priests and religious. But now it has been restored to its original, wider application, and all our baptized people are invited to experience their calling from God. There is nothing dramatic about this. It just means that I don’t just stumble into the Christian way by default, but that God has chosen me: “I have called you by name; you are mine.” “You didn’t choose me; no, I chose you, and I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that would remain.” If the gospel is now, and I am every person in the gospel, then, through the gospel of today, I am being called again.

The starting point of Jesus’ message was very like that of John the Baptist. “Turn from your sins, and back turn to God, because the kingdom of heaven is near.” Turning away from sins is a voluntary act, which can be reversed. There is a story to illustrate that point. When Leonardo da Vinci was asked to do a painting of the Last Supper, he searched far and wide for models for each person in the scene. He found a fine-looking young man, full of vitality, as the perfect model for Jesus. In the following months he did the same for models for each of the apostles, leaving Judas till last, not knowing how to represent him. Finally, he came across a tramp whom he thought was ideal for the part. Leonardo brought him to his studio, but while the work was in progress, he came to a shocking realization. This man had been with him months before, representing Jesus. In the meantime, he had taken to drink and lost his way, and was now homeless. It was a shock to Leonardo, and a prod to conversion for the man who modelled as Judas.