

Mark 1: 22. They were amazed at his teaching.

What does Jesus say? Jesus says “come”. When he first sees the first disciples he says “come”; come and follow me. Christianity never gets past that. Following Jesus is what Christianity is.

*Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?*

*Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?*

*Will you let my love be shown, will you let my name be known,  
will you let my life be grown in you and you in me?*

“Come and follow me” does not mean going it alone. It means walking where Jesus walks. It means walking with him. Christians never grow beyond that. It means learning to trust when you don't know where you are going. Learning to trust that the one you are following will lead you and hold you and keep you and never, never forget you.

Jesus says come. And come especially when you need me. His very words are *Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest*. You'll have heard that before. But listen to it in an up-to-date translation and understand what it means. *Are you tired? Worn out? Burned out on religion? Come to me. Get away with me and you'll recover your life. I'll show you how to take a real rest... I won't lay anything heavy or ill-fitting on you. Keep company with me and you'll learn to live freely and lightly.*

*You'll learn to live freely and lightly.* Is there anyone of us who does not long for that. Jesus says “Come”. Come and be comforted.

But, come with your eyes open. This is not an invitation to a life of ease. These first disciples were in no doubt., Following Jesus is not cheap. He made it clear to them then, as he makes it clear to us now, that following him means being the people he wants us to be. He even talks about taking up a cross. The cost of following him can be the giving up of all that

keeps us from him: surrendering some of the very things we hold most dear.

*Will you come and follow me if I but call your name?*

*Will you go where you don't know and never be the same?*

Make sure you have read the small print.

What does Jesus say? Jesus says "go". The story begins when he says "Come": but it reaches the culmination when he says "Go". The fishermen disciples followed him from the start: and they were there, gathered with the others, when Jesus prepares to take his leave. Easter has brought Jesus, dead and dead no more, to the very sea-shore where first he called them to follow: and now he gives them his command *Go! Go and make disciples of all nations... And remember, I am with you always.* This is his great command, his great commission, to his followers. Go.

Is it the word that his followers hear today? Could you say that his church is going anywhere? Could you call the church today, the church of St Paul and St Columba and Mary Slessor, could you call the church that we know a missionary church? I remember a church deaconess years ago telling me that she had asked a lively young group of progressive Christians to act out in groups a little drama showing what their dream was for the church of the future. Every little group began their drama in the same way: by arranging a number of chairs in a circle. Chances are we would be even less dynamic today. A number of chairs in a circle. Is that the church of St Paul and St Columba and Mary Slessor?

Well, it might just be. It might just be that there are signs of today's followers of Jesus listening to him and following him and going. Going where the need is sharpest. Going where the pain is deepest. Going where there is very little sign of light. I think of a group of Stirling Christian working and praying and eventually opening a new Visitor Centre last year at Glenochil Prison and volunteering there to be with those who come on the wretched business of visiting family members in prison. Nearer home, I think of the commitment of members of this congregation to the

Edinburgh Clothing Store, a charity run by volunteers, offering clothing, shoes, bedding, etc for people in genuine need. Who would have thought that in today's world over 1500 people would be referred to the clothing store in this prosperous city last year? And among them many in terrible need. Would you not agree with me that that is exactly where Christians ought to be and what Christians ought to be doing?

And I think of Christian Aid. Christian Aid going in the name of Jesus to the Camps of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh – three quarters of a million of them, helping to provide healthcare and clean water in Jesus' name. Christian Aid campaigning for tax justice and making clear that huge price poor countries have to pay as a result of tax dodging. Where the need is greatest. Jesus says "Go".

What does Jesus say? Jesus says "Stay". The old translation was *Abide in me, and I in you*. The modern translation might be *Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you*. Abiding is such an old-fashioned word. But it might be a word for our time. For a time when everything is moving. A hundred years ago most people worked at the same job, lived in the same place, shared their home with the same people, all their lives. Not so now. Everything and everyone is on the move. A global world in a post-modern society. Some of that can be completely liberating: and some of it can be completely dehumanizing. How can stable lives be lived in a volatile world like this? In some parts of our lives, in some parts of our world, a word we need for today might be "stay". Jesus says "Abide in me".

A young man looked at the world around him. Europe was collapsing before his eyes, the economy was falling fast, huge numbers were dying from diseases against which there was no medicine. His name was Benedict: he was 22 years old when he worked out his "way of living" for the tiny community of monks around him. Fifteen hundred years later, his "Rule of St Benedict" which he produced for his monks remains, I think, the oldest written constitution under which any human beings still live. His great theme for challenging the instability of the world was this: in his

rule he called his monks three commitments for stability: to a commitment to each other and to the place they found themselves and to God. Stay with each other, stay here, stay with God.

If that might be a recipe for stability in our changing world then there might just be a place for church in our global, post-modern world. For Morningside Parish Church has a long history of just that. Commitment to each other – we are a congregation trying to care for each other. Commitment to our place – we are a congregation seeking to be the servant of our parish. Commitment to God – we are a congregation seeking every Sunday and every day to grow in faith. Stay with each other. Stay here. Stay with God. A call to stability might on some lips be a reactionary rallying cry – a call to repeat “the good old days”. But on the lips of Jesus it might be better than that. It might offer a way of keeping human life human. Jesus says *Abide in me, and I in you*.

What does Jesus say? Come. Go, Stay.

Jesus – he seems to be all over the place. Here, there and everywhere. Exactly.