

## **10<sup>th</sup> November 2024 – 3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday before Advent**

It was 1914 and the First World War had just broken out. The subject dominated every conversation. Rumours spread that a mobilisation of reservists was underway. Two brothers, Joseph or Magnus were in the reserves and knew that a general call-up was inevitable. Joseph responded and enlisted in B Company of the 17th Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers. Whilst his brother Magnus joined the Machine Gun Corps. By November 1915, Joseph found himself in Flanders fields taking part in the opening battle of the Somme. Nothing could prepare him for what he saw and heard. By the summer of 1918 aged 26, he was a lance corporal. It had been a relatively quiet August and there had been fewer casualties. Suddenly the camp erupted with the sound of gunfire as it was strafed by a high velocity German gun. Joseph and another soldier were hit, their horses dismembered. Joseph quickly lost consciousness and died of his wounds.

Neither of these brothers are fictional characters. Both were my great uncles who answered the call to serve their country. One returned home from the war, the other sadly paid the ultimate price with his own life.

Today's Gospel narrative also tells the story of two pairs of brothers receiving a call-up. All were fishermen - Simon and Andrew and James and John. They responded to Jesus' call to become his disciples and follow him. They left everything – their families and their livelihoods to become fishers of people. Likewise in our Old Testament reading, Jonah responded to God's call and went to the city of Nineveh.

Whilst very few of us are ever likely to receive call-up papers to serve King and Country, most of us have received and responded to the call of Jesus to "Follow me". It is not a bidding to treat lightly since discipleship frequently comes at a cost - hardship, suffering and even martyrdom. Many of Jesus' first disciples paid the price with their own lives, as have countless Christian martyrs down the centuries. So, as we remember the fallen from two world wars and subsequent conflicts, let us also remember the call that Christ makes on us and like the first disciples, respond unswervingly.

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