



## **Hinges of History** **Rev Richard Bonifant**

Year A, Epiphany 3

Isaiah 9: 1-4, Matthew 4: 12-23

25 January 2026

One of the great joys of the post-Christmas season is finding a new calendar! I have a new calendar hanging in our home which includes a wide range of interesting facts. For example, earlier this week the fact for the day was that on that day in 1351 an English cook was sentenced to one day in the stocks for cooking a chicken pastry described by the magistrate as, "foul and stinking and an abomination to all humankind." This is not the entry on this calendar that I'm going to speak about today, but I couldn't resist sharing it because it made me laugh.

The entry that really caught my attention is one towards the end of the month that reads, on this day in 1926 Vasili Arkhipov was born to a poor family near Moscow, and though you probably don't know it, you may owe him your life. I love the fact that we live in a time where looking into such an enticing statement is as easy as picking up your phone and doing a quick internet search. And here is what I found.

At the height of the Cuban missile crisis, Vasili Arkhipov was the second in command of a Soviet Nuclear submarine that was in the waters off the coast of Cuba. An incident took place where the submarine lost radio contact with Moscow and for a number of reasons the captain formed the view that war had begun between America and the Soviet Union. The captain decided to launch a nuclear torpedo at American ships in the area, but required the consent of two other senior officers. Protocol demanded that all three officers were in agreement before the launch could take place. Of the three officers involved only Arkhipov refused to fire the weapon. Had that weapon been fired, there could well have been a nuclear war. So maybe the assertion made by my new calendar is right...maybe we are all here because of that one person's actions.

There is a writer I quite like named Thomas Cahill. Cahill is an American academic who more or less writes popular history books. He

has written six out of seven book series that he calls “The Hinges of History”. This series focusses on key moments in human history and how those moments have shaped the world we live in. That title of “The Hinges of History” is a good one as it describes pivotal moments where history seems to turn in a new and unimagined direction. Perhaps the moment I just described, when a soviet naval officer opted for peace under challenging circumstances, was a hinge of history. A moment when human civilisation was turned away from the brink of a third world war.

This morning’s Gospel reading is another hinge moment in history, certainly for those first followers of Jesus. A moment of turning from one pathway through life in order to follow a new one. Did these first disciples of Jesus really just drop everything and follow him? In some churches that idea is held up as being the definitive way conversion takes place. Jesus calls and we follow. I don’t actually know very many people for whom that is the case. From my conversations with different people on this topic, the common theme seems to be that a decision to follow Christ often takes place over period of time. It may include certain memorable moments, or particular conversations, or even a rare moment of clarity, but most commonly I hear people speak of a growing relationship with God that deepens over time, rather than a singular profound experience. I know for myself that my commitment to my faith journey happened and continues to happen through lots of little things, seldom one big thing.

For this reason I suspect that when Jesus called the first of his companions that call did not come out of the blue. How many of us would simply up sticks and walk away from employment and family to take up with a complete stranger? Not too many I hope. My feeling is that these first followers had some kind of relationship with Jesus prior to when the recorded story begins, but that is simply speculation which cannot be supported by the biblical narrative.

What we can say with certainty is that these disciples were experiencing a hinge in their personal history whether they realised that or not at the time. At the moment Jesus’s life took a new direction, several others also chose to journey with him. These disciples were not compelled to go with Jesus, but rather they chose to respond to an invitation. They would of course go on to experience other pivotal

moments in which they had little choice, such as the crucifixion, the resurrection, and if our tradition holds true, many would also give their lives in service to others.

In the light of today's reading perhaps you would like to reflect on your own story. To see if you can recall pivotal moments when your life turned in a new direction. Was God part of that experience, or was that moment accompanied by a sense of God's absence? Was your pivotal moment a time of grief, a change in employment, travel to a new place. Perhaps your pivotal moment was a kind word or a small encouragement when you didn't expect it. Maybe it was the end of a relationship, or the beginning of new one.

The hinges of our personal histories are not always random accidents. They can be places where God has shaped who we are as people, sometimes in ways we only recognise years later. And not all hinge moments are in the past—perhaps you are living through such a time in your life right now. Like Arkhipov choosing peace, or those first disciples choosing to follow, our responses in pivotal moments matter more than we know. The challenge is to trust that God is present with us and is always seeking the best for us, even when we are unaware of it. Amen.