

Sunday 8th January 2023. Be good news! Luke 5v1-11

'Be called'

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Luke 5v1-11 Jesus Calls His First Disciples

5 One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God. ² He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

January is one of my favourite months of the year. After the rush of Christmas, January brings a little calm. The days are getting longer and there is the opportunity to reset and refocus, to engage with the Lord and ask him what he wants us to prioritise over the year ahead. For me it feels a little like I can now actually begin ministry at All Saints and the villages. Last term was a rush of learning names, getting to grips with life in a new city and different ways of doing things. But now as I stand here today, I see people I know, I am beginning to know your stories and to understand how the Lord has weaved our lives together in this place for such a time as this. I have even figured out how to switch the lights on in this building which is actually more challenging than you might ever imagine!

Now I am asking the Lord what are our priorities should be for 2023, and I am excited to be kicking off our new sermon series today with Luke chapter 5 because Luke wrote his Gospel as an invitation for you and me to be radically called and transformed by the life-giving message and story of Jesus. Often this takes place in ways we can't even imagine yet. He wants us to become like the first disciples who were so astonished after encountering Christ that they were compelled to leave familiarity behind to follow him. So I believe there is a fresh call for each one of us today despite the challenges we all face on a day-to-day basis.

We're beginning 2023 facing continuing raised levels of fear and anxiety in our nation. A winter of discontent, war in Europe, health problems, environmental threats and rising disillusionment amongst the younger generations are challenging everyone's collective sense of wellbeing. But equally most people know that fulfilment cannot be found simply through

the pursuit of pleasure, and contentment cannot simply be bought or sold. What we all need is to recapture a God-given vision, calling and clear sense of purpose.

Martin Luther-King Jr once said "If a man hasn't discovered something that he will die for he isn't fit to live".

So this passage about the calling of the first disciples in Luke 5 is a perfect place to begin the year as we seek a new perspective together. It is a passage that has gripped me personally over the years, particularly when God is speaking to me about being obedient and taking steps of faith. In it we see ordinary practical people so astonished by the power of Jesus, that they end up taking unexpected steps away from the comfort of their routine existence in response to his call.

Someone said 'if you want to learn to pray more, get in trouble more!' and it's during the times when we face uncertainty and we are forced out to the deeper water we learn most about living the life of faith.

When we face a challenge, sometimes God wants us to take a risk of faith that he wants to reward. Verse 5 shows how Simon Peter risked humiliation for asking his men to go out fishing again when they had only just finished washing their nets from the previous trip. Why should he, the expert fisherman, take instructions from this newbie teacher who was only a carpenter from Nazareth? Yet something in Simon Peter stirred him to be obedient to Jesus' instructions. He took the decision to let Jesus overrule his pride and common sense. "Because you say so, I will".

Hebrews 11v6 says 'without faith, it is impossible to please God'.

Faith means taking risks. Apparently, Justin Welby's strapline for his time at Liverpool Cathedral was *this Cathedral should be a safe place to do risky things*. He said this: 'Jesus sent his disciples out to heal and transform – to take risks; to bring people into the presence of the living God. Christians are to be people who go out and make a difference because the power of God and the love of Christ. Whatever Christianity may be, it is fire and passion not comfort and ease. Risk means taking chances with things that may and will fail, whether styles of worship, or new forms of church life, or in reconciliation amongst people who are in conflict, or in offering generous hospitality and love... if we trust in Christ we can do no less than take risks.' Put out into Deep water, says Jesus, and let your nets down for a catch.

It feels like we are preparing to put out into deeper waters this year as a Church here too: We need to find new ways to reach our community and share the life of Jesus with them. That could be by meeting practical needs or inviting people to hear the message of Jesus through Alpha. Many people are going through tough times with their physical or mental health, and others are going through the pain of bereavement and will need ongoing comfort and support. We will have to learn to manage without this building for a while – and manage the continuing uncertainties in the meantime. We will have to stretch our faith for finances and trust in God our provider. It is unsettling – and yet exciting at the same time, because I am

looking forward to seeing what the Lord does with us through the power of his Holy Spirit. I know he is faithful. The mountains we face now will become the vistas where we celebrate God's wonderful provision.

Just a year into my curacy I reached a deadline to book flights for a mission trip to Africa and at that point the team didn't have any money. We had been challenged to simply pray for the money rather than fundraising, but none had come in and one of the mission team was threatening to pull out. I was trying to remain calm and full of faith, but I needed to click 'confirm' on the airline web page and I was struggling. I was on my knees praying about it when my gaze was drawn to the bible open by the bedside at verse 4: "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Well I certainly felt I was in deep water at that moment, but I felt assured that I was only being obedient, so I pressed on in faith. Well God was faithful. We got all the money we needed - over £4000 and we had £11 to spare, which I suspect was probably just an accounting error on my part! I brought back a rock from the Zambezi river as a testimony to God's rock-solid faithfulness.

God will provide – we just have to be obedient for the next step.

A couple of other things to note from this passage. Firstly, the people pressed in around Jesus as he taught them the Word of God. Signs and wonders follow the preaching of the Word and it sets the context for everything that follows. Mahatma Gandhi, who was not a Christian, once said: "You Christians look after a document containing enough dynamite to blow all civilization to pieces, turn the world upside down and bring peace to a battle-torn planet. But you treat it as though it is nothing more than a piece of literature."

Well we must continue to prioritise the preaching the Word of God faithfully this year. We must humbly allow the Holy Spirit to grow our understanding of the whole Bible, with God's Kingdom plans finding their fulfilment in Christ's grace and truth. As we humbly submit ourselves to God and his story, then he is faithful and the church will grow. Signs and wonders will follow.

Another thing to note is that one encounter with the grace and power of Jesus is enough to totally change your priorities. Peter was given the blessing of the biggest catch of fish of his entire life, yet the final verse says they pulled their boats up on shore, left *everything* and followed him. In a matter of minutes, they were transformed from *fishermen* to *fishers of men*.

During those moments of transformation, Peter was convicted of the state of his heart. He fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" Repentance means being willing to turn around and change direction.

A number times over the past term I have found myself on my knees praying alone or with others through some tricky situations.

How often do we actually kneel before God with a willingness to change?

When you realise you are in the presence of the living God the effect must be humility. God's awesome presence brings with it a sense of exposure. Imagine your thoughts and attitudes on display for him to see – most of us would run and hide. But we have a choice when we sense that God is coming near. You can run and hide or you can draw closer to God in fear and

trembling. Despite being gripped by the fear of the Lord, Peter actually drew nearer to Jesus with a posture of humility.

This is a new year and a new opportunity to take stock. Perhaps it's a time to ask yourself 'am I going to hide away from God this year or am I going to draw near and place myself at his feet, relying on his mercy and grace?'

Peter's humble repentance was rewarded with a fresh calling and commission.

"Don't be afraid;" Jesus said to Simon; "from now on you will fish for people."

As Jill Weber noted during this week's Lectio 365 it is wonderful to see that Jesus doesn't discard his new-found disciples' passion and skill set. They are going to keep fishing – they're just doing it in another way. God takes our skills and talents and utilises them for his glory. As we learn to become more like Jesus, we not only become more like him, we also become more fully and freely ourselves.

God knows exactly how we are wired. He knows your gifts and talents but also your doubts and fears and yet he still says 'follow me'. He is asking us to follow him in 2023 wherever that will lead us. Are you willing to put out into deeper water to see what he will do? Just remember Jesus began his commission to Simon and the other disciples: *Don't be afraid*. Let's pray.