

NT Reading: Luke 5v1-11 Peter and the Miraculous catch : OT Reading: Isaiah 6 v1-8 (esp v7)

One day Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Galilee while the people pushed their way up to him to listen to the word of God. ² He saw two boats pulled up on the beach; the fishermen had left them and were washing the nets. ³ Jesus got into one of the boats—it belonged to Simon—and asked him to push off a little from the shore. Jesus sat in the boat and taught the crowd. ⁴ When he finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Push the boat out further to the deep water, and you and your partners let down your nets for a catch.”

⁵ “Master,” Simon answered, “we worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will let down the nets.” ⁶ They let them down and caught such a large number of fish that the nets were about to break. ⁷ So they motioned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full of fish that the boats were about to sink. ⁸ When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he fell on his knees before Jesus and said, “Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man!” ⁹ He and the others with him were all amazed at the large number of fish they had caught. ¹⁰ The same was true of Simon’s partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.” ¹¹ They pulled the boats up on the beach, left everything, and followed Jesus.

This is the story of two miraculous catches. The first is a shoal of fish, the second is the soul of a fisherman, one called Simon, later known as Simon-Peter or Peter, when Jesus renamed him Petra, the Rock. What an incredible transformation from a rough-necked and foul-mouthed fisherman, to a man that 2000 years later is regarded as the first Pope by a billion people, and for which there are places of worship named after i.e. St Peters in most towns and cities around the World. And it all started in this account, a short story written beautifully in Aramaic, which Luke found and included in his gospel.

In this story there is a basic pattern shown here by Jesus for evangelism (reaching out to others with our faith), but there is also a message to us about the transforming love of the Fathers heart for us, and the need for us to respond to that Love by sharing it with others.

V1-2 One day Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Galilee while the people pushed their way up to him to listen to the word of God. ² He saw two boats pulled up on the beach; the fishermen had left them and were washing the nets.

The Scene: First we see Jesus has entered the World of People. He is not staying in the synagogues for people to come to hear him. He was out on the shore of the big Lake, probably in or near Capernaum. This is early in his ministry but in Lukes’ narrative he has already got the reputation for being a great speaker and healer. People wanted to hear him, and they wanted to be healed. They pushed in on him to get closer, pushing him onto the beach and to the edge of the sea. There were two boats pulled up onto the beach near him and the fishermen were out washing the nets of all the stuff that had got caught in them that was not edible. Amongst them was Peter, he was working, he had not come to the shore to listen to Jesus, but they certainly knew each other because Jesus had been to Simons house and healed his mother-in-law of a high fever. It doesn’t tell us if Simon was pleased that his Mother-in-law had been healed, but the moment she was healed, she got up and started waiting on them, so presumably he was! Peter now owed Jesus. Returning favours is an integral part of Middle Eastern culture.

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Enters his boat. So Jesus takes the liberty of climbing into Simon’s boat without asking permission. He was owed one, so why not? Jesus is engaging Simon Peter, but he is not preaching at him. First, he separates him out from his peers, from their distractions and from his net washing. He wants Peter’s attention. When we want to start

sharing the Gospel with some-one new, where do we start? Jesus starts by asking Peter for help, he engages him in an activity.

The shore of the lake has a number of inlets, each of these acts acoustically like an amphitheatre. By withdrawing a little from the shore and addressing the people from the boat would have made Jesus' voice travel to more people. Simon – I need your help. Will you help me? His culture allowed him little option to refuse, and Jesus did genuinely need Simon Peter's help, it was not just a ruse. The boat would naturally drift away from the shore and it would take a skilled boatman to keep in one place to act as a preaching platform for Jesus. There are other incidents where Jesus first engages some-one with a request. For example, with the Samaritan woman at the well, it was the request for a drink.

Jesus sat down in the boat, rather than stand to preach like you may think. Sitting was the posture of authority. Rabbis usually sat down to preach. In the synagogues was a teaching chair called the 'Moses seat'.

Jesus has now separated Peter from any peer pressure and whilst confident in doing his professional task he was freed up to listen openly to the teachings of Jesus. He was now a captive audience. Peter's familiar surroundings were now being changed into a life-transforming encounter.

Then when he had finished teaching the crowd, probably a long time, Jesus turned his full attention to Peter. He did this with a preposterous suggestion.

⁴ When he finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Push the boat out further to the deep water, and you and your partners let down your nets for a catch."⁵ "Master," Simon answered, "we worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will let down the nets."

Preposterous demand The Sea of Galilee had a variety of fish in the first century, including Sardines, Barbels, and Musht (a good sized fish up to 18" long, now sometimes referred to as the Peter fish). But last night they caught nothing.

Jesus tells Peter to push his boat out further into deep water, get his partners out to help, and let down their nets for a catch. He told him what to do and what would happen – he would get a catch. Whilst Peter might listen to the Godly words and poetry of a Rabbi, he wasn't keen to take instruction from this former builder and joiner on how to go about his business. The fish had moved on, they had trawled the drag net all night through the shallows, and nothing. It was pointless fishing in deep water, and with the night nets loaded, the fish would see and avoid them during day-time. There were so many reasons why this was preposterous.

Peter responds by calling Jesus Master, the Greek word used 'epistates' can mean Teacher but is just as likely to mean 'the Chief' of 'the boss man' – OK Jesus you're in charge here, you're calling the shots BUT....

This is what Simon Peter said:-

"we worked hard all night long and caught nothing. But if you say so, I will let down the nets."!

This is what Simon Peter probably thought and would have liked to say:-

"Listen teacher. My boys and I are professionals. We know where the fish feed – its along the shore in the shallows. It's where the streams or springs of fresh water enter the Sea, that's where they like to go. Those like us with the experience and inside knowledge of these springs know where to fish. The best time to catch them is at night because that's when they feed. In the sunlight most of those in the shallows hide under the rocks. That's

why we were out on the lake all last night. We have just worked the fishing areas and caught nothing. We are not stupid, we were just unlucky. The shoals are just not over this side of the lake. We are now dead tired and I have stayed awake a few more hours to serve you, and now you want me to waste several more hours in pointless fishing, You Rabbis think you know everything and now you order me to fish during the day, beyond the shelf, into deep water, under the bright sun where any fish mad enough to be out there would see our thick night nets and avoid them. But as I am indebted to you, so I don't really have a choice, I will do this ridiculous order and at least if I do this I will have completed my debt to you and I will get the satisfaction of proving you wrong when we catch nothing. And I am certainly not getting my partners involved as you suggest, they are tired out too and they don't owe you a debt."

Put yourself in Peters sandals. Jesus has picked you out, He has spoken to you personally. You have listened to him, and clearly heard what he wants you to do. You are reluctant but you have decided you will do it anyway. That's in Peters place, but what about when this happens to you. You hear, probably in your mind, Jesus telling you to do something. Do you hear him, and yet feel reluctant? Do you do it anyway, perhaps because as a Christian you feel you have to because He died for you on the cross, but you don't want to, you feel uncomfortable, you feel this is leading nowhere, I'm going to be embarrassed when no-one listens, when nothing happens.

On a scale of 0-10, how confident was Peter, that if he does **do** what Jesus says, then the outcome will **be** what Jesus says – i.e. he will catch fish. Out of 10, probably a zero, not even 1 out of 10.

On a scale of 0-10, how confident was Jesus, that if Peter did what he told him to do, the outcome would be as he said – he will catch fish. 9/10 ? Probably 10/10. Jesus knows what he asking Peter to do and what the most likely outcome will be, perhaps not the exact number or the scale of it, but he knows that Peter will catch fish. Jesus knows what he is asking you to do, and he knows the outcome, which is often not the outcome you are expecting but will be the outcome that Jesus is expecting, which is why he asked you.

Who is going fishing here? Peter is about to. Jesus has already started. He is fishing for Peter and he is off to a good start. He has his attention, he's giving hem some teaching, he's given him the bait, and instruction to follow, and he is ready to reel him in.

There is no mention in the bible of Peters Father, or even his Father-in-law. From reading the gospels you get the impression that he is married and perhaps stays with his Mother-in-law. She is the only relative that gets a mention. Perhaps surprising in the Jewish culture where the male line is so important. The other two that end up in Jesus' small group are James and John, for whom we are told they are the sons of Zebedee, who is very much alive and kicking, but nothing of Peters father. Peter has this fishing business working closely with Zebedee and his boys, who are cousins of Jesus. The bible tells us that Zebedee is married to Salome, and elsewhere that Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the sister of Salome. So Jesus would be their cousin, and he would be well known to his cousins and through them to their business partner Simon which is probably how Jesus got to be healing Simon Peters mother-in-law in the first place.

Despite his formidable exterior lies within the man the need for a Father, perhaps he grew up without one. Jesus, the Rabbi in his boat, has with him, in him, the Father heart of God. His Father is not just up on high looking down, like at his baptism, saying this is my dear son with whom I am well placed and check out this cool Spirit Dove that I am sending down for him. Jesus wants Peter. The Father heart of God within Jesus wants to adopt him into his family because God loves Peter, just like he loves each one of us. He wants Peter, to be adopted into his family,

to be a co-heir with Christ. God does not adopt any of us reluctantly (no-one adopts reluctantly), but He has literally gone to Hell and back to get those adoption papers signed.

What is going through Jesus' mind as he watches Peter steer the boat into deeper water. In his human form, how much does Jesus know about Peter's future? Does he know he will follow him and do great miracles, be a pillar of the Church and be a name to be remembered always? Does he know that Peter will be hard work at times, will fall asleep when he needs his support at Gethsemane, say stupid things at inappropriate moments (e.g Mt of Transfiguration), cut off a guards ear with his sword, deny him three times at the time of his trial, and then flee the scene when he is crucified? I think probably not, as we see Jesus learning more about his purpose and mission as his ministry progresses and this is early days, but would it have made any difference if he did. I think not. He is passionate about Peter, and as his life story unfolds we see Jesus at the resurrection quick to reassure Peter that he is still loved and valuable to him, and quick to empower him with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. Jesus knows all about us, past, present and future and knows all the ways that we will let him down but he still wants to love us, reassure us of his presence, and empower us with us Holy Spirit.

⁶ They let them down and caught such a large number of fish that the nets were about to break. ⁷ So they motioned to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. They came and filled both boats so full of fish that the boats were about to sink.

Big Catch. Peter and Jesus let down the nets. Peter would have dreamt that one day he would hit the jackpot and catch so many fish, that it would strain the nets. He would earn a fortune. It would be the lottery win of fisherman. Imagine a child on holiday in a seaside arcade and he has persuaded a parent to allow him to put a pound in a slot machine against their better judgement. Just the one then, just this once whilst your Mothers not watching. He has three goes for his pound. First two goes nothing, but with his last credit he still pulls the arm with expectation. Cherries, then Cherries again, and the third one stops on Cherries, and the machine starts paying out the ten pound prize, chink chink chink as the pound coins fall, but they don't stop. Imagine the child's face as the collecting tray fills up and starts to spill out on the floor, with his parent trying to catch all the money that's falling off. A face of excitement and yet fear too, this can't be right, its too good to be true, a security guard will catch us, take the money back and tell us off.

He does not call out to his partners who are still washing their nets, but he beckons to them. Sound travels seven times further over water, and he does not want this bounty to be brought to the attention of other fishermen further down the shore. This is his catch. With James and John now helping in their boat, the four of them haul up so much fish, that the two boats can hardly stay afloat. Peter is excited and yet fearful. Did the penniless Rabbi somehow know of a new underground spring that had opened up but not want to profit from it. Could his teaching be more important to him than money, even great wealth. Or is there more to this man than even the miraculous healings. What he did know was that he was in the presence of one much greater than him. A moment of realisation sinks home to Simon.

When Simon Peter saw what had happened, he fell on his knees before Jesus and said, "Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man!"

Simon fearful Simon Peter no longer calls Jesus, Master, Chief or Boss man. He is on his knees in his boat. He knows that even in his familiar wooden vessel, he is now on holy ground. Now he refers to him as Kyrios, Lord. The piercing loving eyes of Jesus look on him, his heart swollen with the Fathers love for Simon Peter. It's too much for Peter, he is convicted of his life-style and sin. He does not want to contaminate Jesus with his sinfulness. This is the first time in Luke's Gospel that the word sinner is used, and Peter uses it of himself. Away from the

scrutiny of his peers, he has the space to enter into this realisation. The Jewish law had sinners contaminating the righteous by making contact with them. But in Jesus, in God, it is the opposite. The righteous one cleanses the one contaminated with sin, by making contact with Him, so that he too the sinner will also be clean.

Imagine you were some-one that wore white collared shirts to work, ones with the little front pockets, but you had the habit of keeping your ink-pen in your shirt pocket. Your favourite Parker pen develop a leak. Black Ink, white shirt – only one outcome. Then a salesman tries to sell you a shirt made of a new material which will self-clean any ink stains as it happens, but more than that it will also mend your ink-pen so that it will not happen again. You would turn the salesman away and direct him to the nearest asylum. But then he produces for you a tailor-made shirt in your size and says you can have it as a free sample, - just try it. Do you? Of course, and when your pen leaks, the ink vanishes and the pen is mended you are awestruck. This just doesn't happen. Stains can not just vanish like that, and the problem solved by a new material. That is not the order of things, its not natural, its supernatural, it goes in the bag labelled 'miracle'.

In the Old Testament Isaiah has a vision of God, in which the holiness of God in the form of a burning coal is touch to Isaiah's lips. This contact removes the guilt and sin from Isaiah, filling him with forgiveness. He is then freed up to do the task that God has prepared for him. Who will be a messenger to my People? Cleaned of sin, Who will go> Isaiah responds here am I, me, me send me.

Jesus is God. Johns gospel refers to him as the Word, who in the beginning was with God. He was the ancient of days that threw the stars into space. He was born old, God became flesh for our sakes. Philip later said just show us the Father, that's all we need. Jesus responded anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. The Father and I are one. Jesus is part of the trinity, Father, Son & Spirit, but he is also all-sufficient. He can remove Peter's sin just as God removed Isaiah's. Yes it is not the order of things, it's a miracle. The unclean does not dirty the clean, but here in the presence of a miraculous God the clean cleans the unclean, the ultimate stain remover.

If we are going to be adopted into Gods family and serve him out of gratitude and love, then first we need to recognise that we have done wrong, and get that miraculous cleansing by contact with the almighty God. Have our own stains removed, then follow him with love and gratitude.

⁹ He and the others with him were all amazed at the large number of fish they had caught. ¹⁰ The same was true of Simon's partners, James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."

Fishers of men. I have two ponds in my garden. In one lives a beautiful large gold fish. In the course of the year the pond gets dirty and many tree leaves fall into. If I don't clean it out in the Spring, then it gives the fish less chance of surviving another year in a polluted pond. I clean the small pond out first, and then there is a lovely clear pond with some plants in that I can move the fish too, whilst I clean out the large pond. In the large dirty pond, the goldfish is hard to catch. He'll come up to the surface for the sun, but if he has any clue I am after him, sees my shadow, or escapes my first attempt, then he will disappear to where I can't see him, and that's it for the day. I have to give up til the next sunny day. But I know what I am doing, I've learnt the hard way, and now have the tactics right. I am doing this for the fish, though he has no way of ever knowing this. Then comes the exciting and scary bit. He is in position, I am in position with my little net, hold my breath, lower it slowly and silently into the water just behind him, then make my move and quickly scoop him up. For a few seconds, and I keep it as brief as possible, the fish is in the net, in distress (if he is able to feel fear, then this is when he would feel it). He can not see what's coming, what is planned for him. This is for the best but he can't understand that. Then in he goes, as I lower him into the clear new pond and his new cleaner life.

Jesus has now made his move, a dramatic one, it needed to be, and he has Peter in the net, floundering and fearful. Jesus speaks gently into his needs. “Don’t be afraid”. Jesus started his tactics by engaging Peter into a single action or two in helping him with a floating pulpit, but now he beckons him into a new pond, a new life, a cleaner one. Yet he was quick to assure Peter that it would be a life in which his old skills would be used but in a new way. It’s important for us to see too the value from some of those strengths we had in our old life before Christ, as to how we can use them in our new life. We are valued by God, our skills and personality our valued by him. Of course some of what we can do, may be inappropriate for our new life, but there will be much we can take across and use for his Glory.

I have tried fishing a few times and never caught a single fish, the truth is I don’t have the patience or enjoy the solitude enough to be a fisherman. To be a good fisherman, you needed to learn to be tactical and to be patient, both useful skills that would help in the new job that Jesus had given him. I want you Simon to follow me, and to use your Fishermen skills still, but this time to catch men. Jesus would supplement his skills and teach him how to do this, mostly by example.

Just like Peter, Jesus also calls us to be Fishers of Men. Even in this passage we get some good teaching we can learn from Jesus on how to catch men, or in other words how to lead people into a loving relationship with Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour. E.g. Separating Peter from peer pressure, engaging him in genuine jobs which uses his skills and makes him feel useful: Giving him quality 1:1 time; helping him to hear the teaching and truths;; engaging God to do something miraculous in his life, being loving, being patient, never giving up on him even though you know he is likely to let you down.

¹¹ They pulled the boats up on the beach, left everything, and followed Jesus

Left and Followed. The writing style in Luke is one typical of the era, in which its brevity, exaggerates a point to underline the sincerity of what was done. So the passage says they left everything and followed Jesus

It was an amazing catch, the stuff of legends, but they would not be just walking away from the catch. They would have sold the fish, fed their families, and would have been setup financially for quite some time. They could have reinvested the money into the business and bought a new fishing boat, but no, they were convinced enough to follow Jesus. They had been netted and it was time for them to net others.

Peters transformation from rough fisherman to holy saint, who 2000 years later is revered by over a billion Roman Catholics, and many more is perhaps more incredible than a self-cleaning shirt. But what Jesus is doing in our lives is no less miraculous. We do not need to fear him. When we do wrong he is not ‘out’ to get us. Instead he is out to get us out, out of our sin, out of old lives, old ways and temptations, into a new life in him. For those of us who claim the name Christian, we have already been netted, and the transformation has begun. He will use some of our old skills and talents for his purposes, but he calls us too, to follow him, go Fishing with him, and for him. To bring others into new life, and the promise of eternal life.

For some of us it is time for Jesus to steer out boat into deeper water and experience more from him. When our tempters, our enemies, our old life come round calling on us, looking for our Sin to taunt us with, to make us feel guilty that we are still living the old live. When they come looking for **Sin**, instead they will see a **Sign** – and it will say - ‘**Gone Fishing**’. Amen.