



Sermon preached by Revd Deborah McVey, 9th February 2025

Readings: *Luke 5: 1-11 and Isaiah 6.1-8*

Epiphany V

“Push out into deep water and let your nets out for a catch.” Luke 5.4b

We come before you God, in awe and wonder at all you have done in our lives. As we explore your Living Word show us what you need us to hear this very day. In the Spirit of Jesus we pray. Amen.

Holy, holy, holy, ... the holiness of God fills both these readings. Isaiah's dramatic vision of meeting God, of being struck by holiness, changed him into the prophet he became. The miraculous catch of fish changed those fishermen into disciples who saw the glory and power of Jesus and wanted to follow him.

This story is placed in Luke at the beginning of Jesus' teaching and healing ministry, after his synagogue speech when he outlined his manifesto for bringing in God's kingdom, preaching Isaiah's words which he knew by heart, a vision for a realm where those who were poor would know good news, those captives would know release, those oppressed would be freed. All because he was anointed by the Spirit of the Lord.

Jesus' preaching certainly stirred up some, they threw him out of town. But by now many people are attracted towards him, to be in his presence, to hear what he had to say about the word of God, to be healed by his word and touch. With a big crowd gathering, he needed a place to be seen and heard so what better than Simon Peter's fishing boat.

So, Jesus works the miracle, Simon Peter has an overwhelming sense of sinfulness in the presence of Jesus, and three fishermen leave one life to take up another as they follow Jesus into the unknown.

This miraculous catch has resonances with the one at the very end of John's gospel (21) where a resurrected Jesus calls his friends to discipleship. They are further on their journey as disciples, but they, like us, still need renewal in Christ's call. Miracles demonstrated who Jesus was and highlighted his purpose and mission. This miracle moves Simon to confession; Jesus speaks words of consolation; “Do not be afraid.” And Jesus calls him to great work in building God's kingdom. Simon doesn't shy away from doing the ridiculous, they've fished all night to no avail, but he is obedient to Jesus' command to get back out there and try again.

That's something to pay attention to; a lesson too in the abundance of the catch, this wasn't just a successful catch it was over the top, nearly sunk the boats, needing many hands to help bring the nets to shore.

God provides super abundance, seen in nature and through the generosity of God's people. Seeing God at work in a new way leads us to reflect on the direction of *our* lives; God knows where we are and offers again and again those words of reassurance and forgiveness. The Spirit of God works through the events of our days helping us attend to God's will for our life.

Simon recognises the holiness of God in Jesus when he wants to get away from Jesus.

I wonder if he was any more sinful than anyone else? This *is* a human response. It was thus for Isaiah the prophet too. His experience of God's presence and power in the Temple echoes

that of Simon when he witnessed such a miraculous catch. Both were struck by God's holiness and its contrast in their sense of unholiness.

I want to explore what we might feel in the presence of holiness. Recently we were at a Service of Thanksgiving for a dear friend, Peter Scott, in Oxford; a man who has made a huge difference for good in the world, in several spheres of life, work and family, and in coping with years of a debilitating illness without complaint. When speaking afterwards we said we had a sense of inadequacy, not unworthiness exactly, but it struck us that our feelings were akin to those of Simon Peter and Isaiah in the face of pure goodness. We know God honours our loving actions however small as we show kindness and walk God's way; we like Isaiah and Simon Peter are human, God knows that.

As Walter Brueggemann wrote¹ *“Faith is a performance of transformation, of old made new, of lost found, of dead made alive. And the whole cosmos is filled with the singing of ex-lepers, the saints of God who attest that gifts from the holy God are given that make for life”*.

The prophet knows he is a weak and sinful human being, yet the very nature of a prophet would be never to think of themselves highly. Their focus was to hear God's word and then speak this truth clearly to a world in need of God's love. Doesn't that sound like God's call to us, on this Racial Justice Sunday? Isaiah's vision helps him understand who God is; being touched by burning coals is a reminder to him of God's justice and compassion. God never terrifies, God rather calls and transforms.

What did Jesus mean when he told the disciples they would “be catching people”?

Does this mean we are called to be overtly evangelistic in sharing the news of God's kingdom? Most of us are not so comfortable in doing so. Why not, if it is the truth we live by? I thought this week after more than one encounter with another on the bus or at bus stops that I must begin writing down my stories of such. Sometimes it is just a smile. Those who use the bus know how easy it can be to get into conversation. Last week I met a young student from Nepal, we waited for the no 7 bus for far too long but in that time she told me she was studying psychology, I told her a little of my life, she asked about church, I asked about her religion. I gave her my email. It may be easier to speak about church, than faith, perhaps on a first occasion. I sometimes hear of family situations when travelling and I will say, Can I include your son in my prayers? People are surprised but are usually heartened. Developing relationships with others must be a priority for all our attempts in sharing the good news. I encourage you to share stories of when you have been able to share for this gives further encouragement to all of us. Above all we should respect where other people are, what other people believe. In this way we learn sensitivity and more. It's worth looking again at Nigel's paper on evangelism on the Downing Place website².

I am reminded that in Greek - ‘to catch’ - includes the ideas of drawing people fully alive, involved and responsive into what is being shared and offered. A living relationship. Simon's relationship with Jesus was developing before this encounter; in two short verses Luke writes that Jesus entered Simon's house after leaving the synagogue, Simon's mother-in-law had a fever, Jesus rebuked the fever, she was healed and immediately got on with the busyness of serving them. Yes, Simon has seen Jesus in action. That would have drawn him to trust Jesus.

The disciples get up and follow their Master, attracted to his life? What attracts us to follow? Jesus calls us his friends, we are his friends, his followers. For them there will be much to learn and discover, to let go of, misunderstand, remember, accept, believe and trust in. For us

¹ “The Song of the Ex-Leper,” in *The Collected Sermons of Walter Brueggemann* (Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 331, 332, 333.

² [Downing-Place-and-Evangelism-Draft-7-for-DP-website-1.pdf](#)

however long we live, we too will find the same in faith. We too will fail and fall away as Jesus' disciples did on Good Friday. Learning takes a lifetime, yet, through us, with the Spirit's help we pray our world will not just hear but be attracted to follow his way.

'Calling', 'vocation'; words used when we speak of those who yearn to be teachers, doctors, nurses, ministers; but it's a summons to focus our lives in a particular direction and applies just as appropriately to each one of us in whatever sphere we find ourselves.

Our friend Peter Scott made a difference through his lifetime study of plant science, later developing the IT that shares information about crop diseases to growers worldwide. We can't all reach such heights, but I believe God's purposes will often chime with our own sense of being and purpose, and God will work the wonders in abundance. We need to listen so we can hear and respond. As Christians, we are all ministers - at work, in retirement, at home as well as our communities and church.

It might be that you will be called to be an elder, this time might be the right time, where you have said no before. We know that in our less active phase of life God's call will be to sit and pray for those who are active. That is so vital. We are called to be the hands and feet, the eyes and ears, the heart and the voice of Jesus Christ. He needs us. There are words of truth and healing that will never be spoken unless *we* speak them. There are deeds of compassion and courage that will never be done unless *we* do them. Each one of us has been anointed with the Holy Spirit at Baptism, each one of us is a proclaimer in the kingdom of God, 'Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?' If we cannot find the words, call on the Spirit, for sometimes proclaiming will be wordless, listen to these words of Oscar Romero³, that great saint of justice who was killed almost 45 years ago:

Let us not tire of preaching love, for this is the force that will overcome the world. Let us never tire of preaching love. Even if we see waves of violence coming to drown out the fire of Christian love, love must win out. It is the only thing that can.

We hear the words of Jesus to throw our nets out deeper, then hear his words; "*Do not be afraid, be at peace*". In faith we believe the God of surprises will fill those nets with abundance for us, for the sake of God's world.

Amen.

³ *Oscar Romero, homily, September 25, 1977*