

2019-02-10 Sue Diggory

4th Before Lent: Luke 5 verses 1 – 11

The candles have been put away, Mary, Joseph and the infant Jesus are back in the 'crib' box until next year as we now begin a new journey; a journey that no longer looks back to Christmas but looks forward, forward towards Lent and the preparation for Easter that we will once again begin on Ash Wednesday.

But first we have a few weeks to spend time with the adult Christ and explore more of his earthly mission, and today we join him as he stands on the shoreline of Lake Gennesaret. This famous piece of water is known to us by three names, the Sea of Galilee, the sea of Tiberias and Lake Gennesaret. It is thirteen miles long, and eight miles wide and it lies in a dip in the earth's surface 680 feet below sea level, and has its own almost tropical climate. Today few people live along its shores but in the first century there were busy and bustling towns built around its shores, Capernaum, Tiberius, Bethsaida and Magdala to name but four.

The last time we read of Jesus preaching he was in the synagogue in Nazareth and now we encounter him on the lakeside, out in the open, in a place where the people were free to gather and listen to his stories. We are told the fishermen were washing their nets, a laborious task that needed to be done each morning after a night on the lake, after which they could head for home and rest and no doubt a good meal!

I wonder how Peter felt as Jesus got into his boat and asked him to put out onto the lake so that the people would all be able to hear him? We can't answer that question but there must have been something even at this early stage that compelled Peter to obey, rather than say no and head for home.

Luke tells us *Jesus sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. [and] when he had finished speaking he said to Simon (he hadn't yet be renamed Peter) Put out into deep water and let your nets down for a catch.*

What would your reaction have been at this point – you've been up all night, you haven't caught nothing to sell in the market, you cleaned the nets, taken this young preacher out from the shore so he can speak to the crowds and now, instead of heading back to the shore, breakfast and a warm comfortable bed he says *Put out into deep water and let your nets down for a catch.*

You are an experienced fisherman, who has been up all night and caught nothing, you know the lake like the back of your hand and now this young itinerant preacher is telling you how and where to fish!

Do you grumble and mutter?

Do you simply refuse?

Or do you do what he says?

I wonder what Jesus has just been saying to the crowds as he sat in the boat, what stories had he been telling them, whatever it was it has had a great impact on Peter as he answers *Master ... If you say so yes. If you say so, I will let down the nets.*

Having been with Jesus that morning something has happened that has made Peter willing to take a gamble, willing to be obedient and to trust, or at least willing to give it a go, remember he an experienced fisherman has been up all night and all his knowledge and expertise of the lake and the usual places to find the shoals of fish that thrived there have been of no use, because the nets had remained empty.

Now he is willing to gamble, to take a risk that if Jesus asks him to do something it is something that may just be worth doing. Peter in all his tiredness was willing to try again.

How often do we just give up when the going gets tough, when we have tried and failed, when we have relied on our own knowledge and our own strength, how often have we given up because when we run out of steam we have not been willing to allow Jesus in to whatever it is that we are finding difficult, how often have we failed to be like Peter and been unwilling to let down our metaphorical nets once more.

Luke goes on to tell us that *they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break!* They caught so many fish that they needed the help of their partners, the other fishermen they worked with to enable them to get this vast catch back to the shore.

That could of course have been the end of the story – Peter and the other fishermen could have left Jesus there on the lakeside, and returned home with an abundance of fish; a catch that would have commanded a good price at the market. They may even have been able to make enough to take a couple of days off, catch up on their sleep, have a bit of what we would now call ‘R and R’ before heading out on the lake again, and they would certainly have had a good yarn to tell in the taverns of Capernaum.

But that wasn’t the end of the story; it was rather the beginning of a new story, the beginning of a story not only for Peter, but for James and John as well. Let’s pause for a moment and consider how Peter reacted to the abundant catch of fish. He must have been astonished and overjoyed that despite all the tiredness it had been worthwhile to follow the preacher’s call, yet rather than being overjoyed he is in fact convicted, rather than being happy he becomes all too aware of who he really is as he sinks to his knees before Jesus, *Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!*

For Peter this was no longer about a boatful of fish, this was about being in the presence of someone who had enabled him to see himself in another way, a way that at that moment was not comfortable, in a way that made him fearful in Christ’s presence, but in a way that made it possible for him to not only hear the words of Jesus but to respond to them as well. *Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.* And we know they did, they left their boats and followed.

Peter was a common fisherman, most likely a ruffian of a man. He was just a simple fisherman, who lived in Capernaum with his family, not well educated and not the sort of person who

would have had a prime seat in the synagogue, not the sort of person who would in our terms be on the PCC, but that made no difference to Jesus, he was just as worthy of blessing as the next man.

Jesus didn't go away as Peter had asked, and Jesus didn't tell him to do anything other than to follow, and to follow as he was, and if we look at the others that Jesus called they too would have been seen by society as 'sinful' – fishermen, tax collectors, terrorists and even prostitutes! Jesus simply said follow me, and do not be afraid. I'm not asking you to change, to become someone else, I'm just asking you to come and let me love you, to love you as you are and to help you share your life with me.

Today Annelise and Ed have responded to the words of Jesus to come, to come to him as a family, to come to him as they are, as they bring Henry for Baptism so that he too can begin like Peter and the others to follow, as he begins his journey of a life shared with Christ. He is of course too young to respond for himself and his parents and Godparents will speak for him, as promises will be made on his behalf, promises that will I pray be fulfilled as he grows in his faith and in his relationship with Jesus, the one who says do not be afraid of me, just follow me and let me love you as you are.

Amen