

Gone Fishing

Luke 5:1-11

We were reminded at Mike's baptism this morning that for all of us, our journey to faith can be at various speeds. Some come quickly once they are faced with the good news. Others, like Mike take a while. Actually, when it comes to spiritual growth, we all move at different speeds too. Some mature quickly whilst there are those who always seem to remain as what Paul calls in 1 Corinthians, spiritual babes. We find the same patterns in scripture that we find in life - not a surprise I guess - and I want to focus on Simon Peter this evening.

In John's gospel we see Simon introduced to Jesus by Andrew, who had been one of John's disciples. Jesus even impressed them by telling Simon he would be known as "The Rock" - Peter - but he certainly didn't rush to follow Jesus.

We don't know if they would have known Jesus prior to the meeting in John 1. There is a possibility they were acquainted because Jesus was a carpenter in a close knit society and of course carpenters made and fixed boats. The gospels indicate Jesus knew Galilee well and was comfortable in and around boats.

Whatever, east of Jordan where John was baptising, a friendship started between Andrew, Simon and Jesus, but it was not yet discipleship. Discipleship was a much closer bond with a rabbi in those days than a mere friendship.

A disciple came under the authority of the rabbi, to be taught, get closer to God and serve the rabbi's needs - it was about commitment and following the rabbi where he would lead them. The rabbi was always "Master" or "Lord". It was a trust relationship. The disciple placed himself under the authority of the rabbi because he believed that the rabbi was a man of God who would bring his followers closer to God. In John 1 Andrew and Simon didn't become disciples - they went home and fished.

The next time Jesus met Simon was in Simon's house in Capernaum. It's in the previous chapter to this evening's - Luke 4. What an amazing sight - a sick woman (Simon's mother in law) miraculously healed - surely Simon would want to follow Jesus after seeing something that impressive. Not on your nelly! Simon just went back fishing!

There is a big difference between knowing about Jesus, even witnessing and recognising His power, and following Jesus. Simon (and Andrew) had that expectation that Jesus was the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world - the Messiah. They had heard Jesus speak. They'd seen an astonishing miracle. The mental assent was there. But it didn't commit him far enough to follow Him.

There are a lot of people in the world who believe Jesus is the Son of God. They believe that Jesus died and rose again and all the rest of it. But that's it. They have never placed all of their trust in Him. That was Simon. Jesus was a great guy to be acquainted with. The miracles were great - and of course He could

have the lend of the boat any time. But follow Jesus? That was just a step too far until the day Jesus gave fishing advice to the expert fisherman.

The same is true of people today. They might believe all that stuff. But is that the same as truly following Jesus? I remember when I was young, there was a well known chorus called "What the world needs is Jesus - just a glimpse of Him" - the sentiment being that if people could see Jesus and all His miracles, then they would readily believe.

The song is flawed because Jesus is already here (or should be!) in the form of His people and the same sort of miracles are still wrought by His Spirit. We think, if only we were a bit more spiritual and if only we had the miracles happen here that happen elsewhere; then people will believe.

Do you know what, I've known plenty of people that have seen the power of God work in their lives. Yet they're still not Christians. The penny hasn't dropped, they haven't had their spiritual eureka moment when the Spirit opens their eyes. It hasn't made a difference to their lives. All around is light, yet they are still in darkness.

I've given you this information before which suggests that coming to faith is like a journey and it takes up to 5 years for adults in the UK to come to Christ and they may hear the gospel about 20 times before it sinks in. But don't be discouraged, conversion is a work of the Holy Spirit of God and He can do anything, anytime and we meet people at different positions on the road anyway.

For those of us who have been Christians for some time we know that there's a huge difference between belief and trust; knowing and following. Being a Christian isn't just an assent to facts it's trusting and following.

How did things change for Simon? This passage tells us quite a lot about what trusting Jesus is all about. Trust gets us to heaven. So here was Simon - a guy who was interested in Jesus. Happy to make His acquaintance and happy to loan Him the boat. But then Jesus tells him to do something weird - what's he going to do now? Let's explore.

After Jesus was speaking, Jesus tells Simon to put the boat out for a big catch. Simon protests at first because the fish had not been biting the previous evening. He's the fisherman; the expert on fish in the lake. Jesus was a preacher guy and a carpenter, not a fisherman.

But he does it anyway. Why? He already had seen the blessings Jesus brought to his mother in law and so it was worth giving Jesus a try. Faith in Christ begins when we start to trust. When we base actions on the fact of who He is, even though we are doing so on the basis of something that seems implausible. That's something we need to be aware of throughout our Christian lives, because we are called to be a people who live by faith and not by sight, and if we are to grow, then what applied before our conversion still applies - our faith should be about trusting and obeying Christ. Not just once, but daily. That's the nature of faith. It isn't based solely on fact, but listening to God and acting upon God's word, however unlikely that is. We all have past experience of God

acting in amazing ways.

Back to our story: Peter was an experienced fisherman. He was not going to get a good catch that time of the day.

But he was prepared to trust Jesus anyway. After all, his mother in law had been healed. His trust now was a simple act. Throwing his nets over for a catch. Didn't cost much but reaped loads. The catch was massive - just as Jesus said.

Trust opens us to the power of God. *Andrew and Simon caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 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. When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"*

Because Simon was prepared to trust Jesus and drop the nets for the catch, I wonder what was going through Simon's head? There had been no fish the night before. So there certainly wouldn't be any there now. It was impossible - but he heard Jesus' voice and trusted Him and saw His awesome power. He trusted and saw God at work in power.

What do you think about when you see manifestations of the Holy Spirit? There are some people who say "unless I see a miracle, I will not believe". Yeah and the rest of it. As I've already pointed out, I've seen miracles happen in people's lives, both Christians and otherwise and so often it makes no difference to them! And that's a remarkably scriptural point of view. Remember Moses? He saw something amazing and still took persuading to go back to Egypt and lead the Israelites. But God is gracious and wants to bring us blessing despite ourselves because He loves us.

Actually, the Christian faith usually works the other way. God speaks, you trust and then you see the miracle. Skeptics who say they will never believe unless they see a miracle still don't believe when they do. They'll try to dismiss it.

Does it make you uncomfortable when people talk about miracles today? It does many Christians because it is not their experience. Then maybe don't be afraid to be like Simon when it does happen, because when we count our blessings we find amazing things happen more often than we think. And what was Simon's response as he sees the product of his trust? He sees the "impossible" haul of fish, suddenly realises how amazingly holy Jesus is and says "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" - he felt sinful and inadequate.

Do you feel somehow inadequate as a believer? Seeing God at work in power is not just for the "super-Christians". It's for everyone - but it starts when we listen for His voice and trust Jesus. And we find He still wants to use us despite our weaknesses and it's when we come to that point of simple trust that we find amazing things happened.

So if we are not seeing manifestations of the presence and power of God in our lives and in answered prayer church, then we need to come back to the cross and trust Jesus afresh and realise that He still accepts us in our weakness and

unbelief.

1. Trust makes us productive

Jesus desires that His disciples are productive. That's the standard condition for a disciple. We are called to be people-magnets - encouraging others to come to Christ and follow Him. It is the norm, not the exception to have the sign on our lives

“Gone Fishing!”. Are we? Jesus said "From now on you are going to catch men." In Matthew Jesus is recorded as saying "I will make you fishers of men" I will make you. How do fishermen catch fish? Look at the story. They cast their nets in at the right place and right time - in this case it was in Jesus' place at Jesus' time.

In the modern church we live in terror of mission or we fish fruitlessly. But all Peter and Andrew did was to trust Jesus and obey Him. They did no differently that day than they had done on the previous night. But when they dropped their nets at Jesus' command things that weren't supposed to happen, just did.

The difference is trusting that Christ will make us fishers of men - we trust Him and do it in his time and space. Trust and obey. Why doesn't the catch come in? We're evangelicals; we preach the gospel? True but are we fishing with the right net in the right place. We need to become hearers of the voice of God when we come to pray, not just opening our mouths. I want to encourage it here. Let's come closer to Jesus, and nurture that relationship with Him individually and corporately. Then the fish will come in by the net load. Discover where Jesus wants us to drop our nets and you get the haul. It's not rocket science - we need to be fishers of men - it's just Jesus.

2. Trust means we obey.

One of the basic principles of Christianity is illustrated here. God's logic works backwards to human logic. As I've already said, in human terms, we want the miracle, then we'll trust. "I'd like to be a better witness, but I really need to see God work powerfully so I'll have the confidence to speak to more people about Jesus."

But God's way is that we start trusting and start moving and then watch the miracles. The reason why so many believers experience barren Christian lives is that they are there waiting for the miracle, but Jesus wants us to simply come and trust Him. Here, Simon started by trusting Jesus by lending His boat and he got to hear some teaching.

But then the next step of faith was bigger - to cast nets to fish even though it was unlikely or impossible and they got the product. Jesus calls us to trust Him and obey Him. the more we trust, the more we act on responsibility given us, then the more we'll see the power of God and people come to Christ.

The cost of commitment for Simon and Andrew was leaving everything and following Jesus. To follow Jesus costs. Trusting and obeying made the difference.

What do we need to lose to follow Jesus? Material things? Our pride? Our dyed in the wool ways? Our stubbornness to change? Our unwillingness to share the Gospel with others? Our hanging on to the way we have done ministry in the past even though it doesn't work?

A follower of Jesus Christ is called a disciple. If you are a follower of Jesus Christ this evening, then you are a learner of Him - a disciple. You make Him Lord and trust Him. You listen to His voice and obey Him.

When I was a teacher, I had different types of "disciple" in my classes. Some were willing learners, others couldn't be bothered. Those who were committed did well. Those that couldn't be bothered; why spend the time to work hard - it was all too much for them - and they never got the results. It isn't any different in God's classroom.

As Jesus' disciples, we're called to fish for people. That's what He makes His people and through it we see the blessing not just in other people's life, but our own too. You may not see yourself like that - but it's the reality of it and it all starts with trusting Him - and then doing what He says.

Reflect on your own life this evening as I read the following words:

WHEN WE WALK WITH THE LORD

In the light of His word,
What a glory He sheds on our way!
While we do His good will,
He abides with us still,
And with all who will trust and obey!

But we never can prove
The delights of His love
Until all on the altar we lay;
For the favour He shows,
And the joy He bestows,
Are for those who will trust and obey.

Then in fellowship sweet
We will sit at His feet,
Or we'll walk by His side in the way;
What He says we will do,
Where He sends we will go;
Never fear, only trust and obey!

Trust and obey!
For there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus,
But to trust and obey