

## **“What a catch!”**

Sermon - Gregor Henderson

Wesley Church, Canberra - 7 February 2010

Luke 5:1-11, Isaiah 6:1-8

Simon Peter was a popular man - the most famous of the twelve disciples, despite, or maybe because of, his well-known failings. Interestingly, we have three different accounts in the gospels of how Jesus called him to be a disciple:

- in Mark and Matthew Jesus is walking by the sea of Galilee and sees Peter and Andrew casting their nets from the shallows - apparently they're too poor to own a boat - Jesus calls them, they immediately respond and along with James and John they join Jesus and follow him;
- in John's gospel Peter is recruited by his brother Andrew; it happens down by the Jordan river where Andrew is a follower of John the Baptist; Andrew is there when John the Baptist points out Jesus as the Messiah, the Lamb of God; Andrew immediately joins Jesus, and one of the first things he then does is to find his brother Peter, introduce him to Jesus and voila, Peter becomes a disciple;
- and then in Luke's gospel we have this extraordinary story of the huge catch of fish, with Peter and his partners James and John converted to Jesus; in this account Peter does own a boat, James and John have their boat too, but poor Andrew doesn't figure at all, he's not present, doesn't rate a mention.

Which of these three accounts is historically accurate, we do not know - perhaps none of them. But that's not the key question. What's more important than straight historical fact in the Bible is theological truth, what does this event teach us about God, about God's purpose for human life, about ourselves, about me the reader and God. There's much theological teaching in Luke's account of the calling of Peter. This morning let me cover just four of these theological learnings.

The first learning is that there are times when God needs our help. And when we do respond by helping God, even when we're a bit reluctant, our relationship with God will be deepened. In today's reading from Luke, twice Jesus asks for Peter's help, and each time Peter provides that help although not without complaint the second time round:

- first, as the crowd presses around Jesus, eager to hear his teaching about God, Jesus asks Simon if he can teach the crowds from Peter's boat, a few metres from the shore. Peter agrees, and rows the boat offshore a little. [It may be worth noting that in Luke's gospel Peter already owes Jesus, for Jesus' healing of Peter's mother-in-law has already taken place, whereas in Mark the healing happens shortly after Peter has become a disciple.] As Jesus sits in the boat, teaching the crowds on the shore, Peter holds the boat in place with skilful use of oar or paddle.
- then second, when Jesus finishes teaching the crowd, he tells Peter to put out into the deep water of the lake and cast the nets; this is where Peter reacts. "Master" he says, "we've already been working all night and caught nothing". In

effect “Fair go Jesus, I want to go home and sleep, don’t ask anything more of me”. There’s another interesting bit here too - the word translated “Master” can also mean “Teacher”, but perhaps more relevantly it’s a word that can mean “boss” or “chief” said in a rather sarcastic tone. “Oh boss, you’re being a bit hard on us here, we’ve been up all night, caught nothing, gimme a break”.

Jesus needed Peter’s help and didn’t hesitate to ask. Peter agreed, albeit with some reluctance, and what a result there was - a huge catch of fish. What might that have to say to us about our relationship with God, in our lives now? What might God be asking of us, needing from us, now, in our lives?

A second theological learning is that Jesus isn’t much interested in the huge catch of fish. It’s simply a way of gaining Peter’s attention, and that of James and John. But you can bet Peter and James and John are immediately working out the dollars here. They’re small businessmen, struggling for a decent living. Wow, there’s probably a month’s income in that one catch of fish. Has Jesus found a new spring feeding into the lake, where shoals of fish will be attracted? Might this catch set them up for more of the same? But Jesus is after bigger fish - people. What might this say to us about our purpose in life, about what’s important in our lives or should be important in our lives, right now?

A third theological learning is that Jesus goes fishing and catches the ones he’s after - Peter, James and John - right there in their ordinary working lives. God’s call to the fishermen came as they were packing up after a fruitless night’s work. It didn’t happen in the synagogue on the Sabbath, it didn’t happen in the temple, it didn’t happen in any religious setting, but with the teaching of Jesus and with the load of fish to get their attention, it happened, God spoke to them, and they heard. What might this say to us about how God is calling to us? Are we ready to listen for God in our ordinary everyday lives? What might God be saying to us, now, in our lives?

And a fourth theological learning is the rightful sense of awe felt by Peter when he recognises this is God calling to him, asking him to become a disciple, opening him to a very different life, no longer a fisherman but a catcher of people, for God. Peter falls at Jesus’ knees and says “Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man”. Notice it’s Lord, now, not teacher or boss or chief, but Lord. Peter now knows Jesus is from God, and it’s God with whom he’s talking. Isaiah had the same reaction when in his vision of heaven he recognised he was in the presence of God “Woe is me” he said, “I am lost for I am a man of unclean lips”. Isn’t it beautiful that God knows Isaiah and Peter are less than perfect, but still calls them? What might that say to those of us who feel unworthy to be in God’s presence, who think we are unfit to be loved and forgiven by God? See what God’s love is like, reaching out to grab our attention, and feel the awe in knowing God is here with us.

We could go on, with learnings 5 and 6 and 7, from this fascinating account of the call of Peter. Peter went on to become one of the leaders of the 12, without him there may have been no church, but he was never perfect. He knew from the way Jesus called him at the Sea of Galilee that God had need of him, that bringing the gospel to people is more important than catching fish, that God comes near to us and speaks to us in our everyday lives, and that rightful awe in the presence of God is a powerful inspiration to commit to Christian discipleship.

To the glory of God, Amen.