

Sermon 10 February 2019 God's Call

Luke 5:1-11

I want to make three points in reference to our Gospel reading. Firstly, we see Jesus preaching from a boat. Just prior to this Jesus had been teaching in the synagogue, but now we have him on the shores of Lake Galilee in a boat, surrounded by a great crowd. I find this to be a very interesting point – Jesus did not need a formal setting for his teaching. He was not into ritual and formality. In fact, quite the contrary. He often chastised the Pharisees for their preoccupation with ritual. I sometimes wonder if down through the ages the Church has not become a little too preoccupied with ritual and so the real intent of our worship – the expression of love for God, for Christ and for one another – has run the danger of being side-lined. Just a thought.

The second point I want to highlight is the benefit of obedience to Christ, and I refer to verse 4 where Simon, in response to Jesus telling them to go out where it is deeper and let their nets down, says, *'Master, we worked hard all night and didn't catch a thing. But if you say so, we'll try again.'* Here we have Simon Peter, an extremely experienced fisherman, being told by this carpenter to drop their nets, even though they have been fishing throughout the night to no avail. But he doesn't hesitate to obey him and what happened? Their nets were bursting with fish. What a message lies there for us. Obedience to God leads to a bountiful life. Bountiful can be interpreted in a myriad of ways but there is no doubt that if and when we can live lives that are in accordance with God's wishes, life becomes so much more meaningful, rewarding and productive. Conversely, if and when we go off track life takes a downward spiral.

Aligned with that, obedience to God should be our criteria whenever we are deciding on a course of action, no matter how weighty that course of action might be. A good question to ask ourselves in that situation is What would God want me to do or what would Jesus do in this situation?

There is a story about Abraham Lincoln who, during the American Civil War, met with a group of ministers for a prayer breakfast. Lincoln was not a church-goer but was a man of deep, if at times unorthodox, faith. At one point one of

the ministers said, 'Mr President, let us pray that God is on our side.' Lincoln's response showed far greater insight, 'No, gentlemen, let us pray that we are on God's side.'

Lincoln reminded those ministers that religion or faith is not a tool by which we get God to do what we want but an invitation to open ourselves to being and doing what God wants.

The third point I want to make is in response to the last two verses, *Jesus replied to Simon, "Don't be afraid! From now on you'll be fishing for people." And as soon as they landed, they left everything and followed Jesus.* I alluded to this last week when I was talking about the power and magnetism of Jesus; how these men were prepared to just drop everything and follow Jesus into what was really for them unknown territory. They were answering his call.

So the message for us here is quite clear, we are also challenged to answer God's call. We are not expected to drop everything and completely change the direction of our lives, but we are called to serve in whatever capacity we possibly can. In the end, we are all called to be disciples of Christ. We might not be musicians, orators, healers but every one of us can serve through kindness and caring, through reaching out to the disadvantaged. Let me relate to you an Arabian fable. It's called The Fox and the Bear.

*One day, a man wandered through a forest and came across an injured fox. The poor creature had been pursued by the huntsmen and had broken a leg in its efforts to escape. Now it lay in the undergrowth, helpless to find food.*

*The man's heart went out to the fox, but as he watched, a grizzly bear loomed up out of the trees, dragging the carcass of an animal it had killed. The bear appeared to ignore the presence of the wounded fox, but when it shuffled off again after its meal, it left the remains of the carcass close to where the fox was hiding. The fox devoured the meat avidly.*

*The next day, the man walked through the forest again. And again, the bear left a tasty morsel for the hungry fox. And on the third day, the same thing happened.*

*The man pondered hard over what he had seen. 'If God cares so much for a wounded fox', he thought, 'how much more will he care for me. My faith is too feeble. I must learn to trust*

*God more.'*

*So the man went into a quiet corner of the forest and prayed, 'Loving Father, this injured fox has shown me what it means to trust you. Now I commit myself entirely to your care. I trust that you will care for me just as you care for the fox.' And with this, he lay down and waited for God to act.*

*A day passed and nothing happened. The man was getting hungry. A second day passed and still nothing happened. The man was deeply puzzled. A third day passed and the man was angry. 'Father', he cried, 'you love that little fox more than you love me! Why don't you care for me when I trust you so much? Why don't you feed me?'*

*At last, hunger forced him back into the town. There on the streets the man came upon a starving child. He railed against God. 'Why don't you do something?!'*

*'I have done something', said God. 'I have created you. But you choose to behave like the fox when you could have modelled yourself on the bear.'*

So we have to ask ourselves, are we a fox or are we a bear? Do we reach out to others or do we wait for others to reach out to us? If we are to call ourselves disciples of Christ, then we are behoved to extend a helping hand to those who need it. It is a gift we all have.

Let me finish with an old Arab saying, *'I will set my face to the wind and scatter my seeds on high.'* It is a poetic way of saying that God expects us to use our talents to build a better world. It warns us that it won't necessarily be easy (wind) but that is the challenge of being a disciple of Christ. He never promised us that it would be easy.

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