

Sermon 9 February 2025 God's Call

1 Peter 2:9-12 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 ritualistic details and trivialities. I sometimes wonder if down through the ages the Church has not become a little too focussed on ritual and so the real intent of worship – the expression of the love for God, for Christ and for one another – has run the danger of being sidelined. 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 him to go out where it is deeper and let their nets down, says, *'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.'* 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.

We alluded to this issue of obedience last week, but the message here is that 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 will, life becomes so much more meaningful, rewarding and productive. Conversely, if and when we go off track, when we deviate from God's will, life invariably 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 or even trivial 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 Civil War, met with a group of ministers for a prayer breakfast. Lincoln was not a churchgoer 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 of 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. Rather than just ask God to fix a problem, our prayer should be to ask God to give us the capability to tend to the problem ourselves. I was reminded of this during the rather arduous journey we have been on in getting our new church and community centre built, but that is another story!

The third point I want to make is in response to the last two verses: *'Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.'* This attests to 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 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 everyone one of us can serve through kindness and caring, through reaching out to the disadvantaged. Let me relate 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 broken its leg and 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 after feeding on the carcass, 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, he saw the bear leaving 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 to 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 that, 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. He cried out, 'Father, 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 town. There on the streets he came upon a starving child. He railed against God. 'This is just too much. Why don't you do something?' God replied, 'I have done something. 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 take the initiative and reach out to others or do we sit back and expect God to do it all? Remember this, God works through us. We are his agents. *'No, O people of God, the Lord has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.'* Micah 6:8.

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. *'Jesus said to the people who believed in him, "You are truly my disciples if you remain faithful to my teachings.'* John 8:31. His teaching, of course, is that we are expected to love our neighbour. And can we remind ourselves that there are no qualifications in that command.

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 has never promised us that it would be easy.