

BACKGROUND – 14 February 2016

Reading: Luke 5:1–11

I felt very much called, about two weeks ago, to preach from these verses today. I can't really explain to you how that happens but through reading and seeing things, maybe in the news or newspaper, sermons develop in the mind. And so it was with Luke 5:1–11. Then last Sunday morning, before coming to Church, I looked at the lectionary to see what Andre would be preaching on. The lectionary gives the readings for each Sunday and is the same in many denominations and churches around the world. Andre usually preaches from the lectionary and I saw that the reading for last Sunday was Luke 5:1–11! I was quite taken aback because I had been so sure that this would be the text today. Then I went to Church and saw on the order of service that Andre was preaching from Luke 9 and not from the lectionary text! Amazing, I could preach about breaking nets and sinking boats and fishers of men after all!

In this reading, the way Jesus acted and spoke turned the miracle of catching fish into a parable about catching people for the kingdom of God.

In other words, Jesus was not merely teaching the word of God as he sat in the boat (vv. 1, 3); he was showing something, by his actions and words, about how he means for his followers to win men and women to faith.

By Jesus' power and authority multitudes of people will be caught for eternal kingdom blessings by the followers of Jesus who teach the word of God, obey the commands of Jesus, humble themselves, and treasure Christ above all.

Jesus had intentionally chosen to teach from a fishing boat (verse 3). So the boat is transformed, so to speak, into an instrument of evangelism. That sets up the parable. The boat is a place where the word of God is proclaimed to the crowds and where fish are caught. Then in verse 4 Jesus tells Simon to push this gospel-bearing boat into the deep water for a catch. "Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch. Simon answered and said, 'Master, we worked hard all night and caught nothing, but I will do as You say and let down the nets.'" This interchange between Jesus and Simon emphasizes the power and authority of Jesus that is about to be displayed. You say it. I'll do it. But

what's the use. We know fishing. You're a carpenter.

The catch was so amazing that the nets are breaking and the boats are sinking. A record number of fish were caught in an area that seemed hopeless, where there had been no success and no harvest before – a lesson for us in our fishing for men. And it was caught at the powerful and authoritative word of Jesus.

Just as it was James and John and Peter, the human fishermen, who brought in the fish, so it will be human fishers of men who bring in the people. It is by Jesus' power and authority that they come, but they come through the evangelistic work of men and women. People come to Christ by Christ's power, but also by human activity. How lovely on the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news.

"All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me," Jesus said, "so go and make disciples" (Matthew 28:18-19). Christ is the decisive power and authority in winning people, but followers of Christ are the instruments of that power.

SERMON

This sermon was inspired by an image of the River Dee on the day the salmon fishing season opened about two weeks ago – the river had flooded all around Banchory, and as the water receded there were shallow pools all over the fields, now cut off from the river. The pools contained fish of all kinds, stranded and destined to die when the water dried out. People "fished" for them with buckets and carried them back to the river, emptying them in so that they could continue on their journey.

It is a good picture of what it means to be a "fisher of men." Reaching out to those stranded by the storms of life, picking them up and helping them on their journey, putting them on the right path, saving their lives.

Imagine that the river is the flow of our lives. Our lives begin in the spawning pools at the source of the river way upstream. The stream becomes a little river and then a bigger and bigger river into the estuary and the open sea, which is heaven.

Along the way there might be miles of rapids with turbulent water crashing over rocks, life can be like that sometimes.

Sometimes there are huge waterfalls when the water plummets a hundred feet in a sheer drop. You know the movie scene where the boat is being carried slowly on perfectly calm waters but the Niagara style drop is just ahead! Life can be like that sometimes.

There are stretches of the river through areas of toil and industry and agriculture. At times pollution clogs up the riverbanks and clouds the water – life can be like that sometimes.

And there are times of leisure, paddling and swimming, canoeing and wind surfing – fortunately life can be like that too.

It is inevitable that the water will reach the sea, it is inevitable that we will die and go to heaven and be with God.

Why do people end up in these stagnant pools cut off from the main flow? How do they end up like the suffocating fish going nowhere?

Some people are simply washed away by the storms of life, overwhelmed by disaster and loss and stress. They may have had faith but that faith has been rocked and shattered by experiences. The flood might have passed and calm returned but they are stuck in that dark place. They do not know that Jesus said **“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.”** (Matthew 11 : 28). Who will go fishing for them?

Others are trapped by their own sinfulness, by the wrong choices and by actions that might have damaged relationships, hurt others. They feel that God could not love them, there can be no forgiveness for what they have said and done. They might be in prison, physically, literally, metaphorically. They do not know that **Jesus came to open eyes that are blind, to free captives from prison and to release from the dungeon those who sit in darkness** (Isaiah 42 : 7). Who will go fishing for them?

Others are rejected by society and the weak are left to flounder on the sidelines as the strong walk on by. The isolated and the lonely, those without a voice, the addicted and the homeless and the displaced

people. They do not know that **Jesus said he had come to preach good news to the poor** (Luke 4 : 18) Who will love them? Who will go fishing for them?

Some have never the heard the Word of God. They know nothing of the love and saving grace of Jesus. They may have grown up in families where God was firmly rejected. Or they may have grown up with parents equally ignorant of the gospel. In the 1950s and maybe 1960s in this country most children probably went to Sunday School because their parents went to church. We have now had over forty years of declining church attendance and two generations who know little of the Christian message. They are stuck in pools of ignorance and disinterest. Who will go fishing for them?

Romans 10 : 13 – 15 from The Message

“Everyone who calls, ‘Help, God!’ gets help.” But how can people call for help if they don’t know who to trust? And how can they know who to trust if they haven’t heard of the One who can be trusted? And how can they hear if nobody tells them? And how is anyone going to tell them, unless someone is sent to do it?

That’s why Scripture exclaims, “How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!” (NIV)

And so the feet of the fishers of men are beautiful feet!

We need to be equipped to be fishers of men. Some fishermen might be able to tickle a trout and catch it with their bare hands but most would go equipped for fishing. Peter, James and John had simple nets. They were successful fishermen especially when Jesus was around.

Jesus spent three years equipping them to be fishers of men and he did it in two main ways.

Firstly, Jesus taught them everything he knew about the kingdom of God. He showed them the power of God, the grace of God, the love of God. He taught them about sin and repentance, about judgment and forgiveness. He taught them about the work of the Holy Spirit although they did not fully understand this until after Jesus’ death when the spirit came at Pentecost. He equipped them with the message to preach and the words to say.

We too need to be equipped in this way, we need to read our bibles and deepen our understanding of what it means to be a Christian. It can help us to study the bible together, share what God is doing in our lives, encourage one another in our individual journeys and encourage one another on our fishing trips.

Secondly, he taught his disciples to pray. Prayer is an essential part of the fisherman's equipment if we want to be fishers of men and women. We are to pray without ceasing (1 Thess 5 : 17). Jesus taught his disciples to pray by example. On many occasions he went out of the house to pray in the early morning, he went up hillsides and onto mountains to pray, into gardens and a stone's throw from the crowds. He prayed earnestly and with passion. It says in Hebrews 5 : 7 **"During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death and he was heard because of his reverent submission."**

Prayers with cries and tears. Prayers when Jesus needed strength because time spent with his father was for recharging his batteries, overcoming tiredness and despair, equipping himself for the next task.

We are organizing a framed picture for the prayer room at the moment. It is in two parts. The top half shows four cute little kittens with the caption "Going into the prayer room." Underneath are lions striding forwards with courage and determination and power, entitled "Leaving the prayer room!" It sums up what prayer can do! If you need some of that lion of Judah strength, come to the prayer room today!

But we don't just pray. Prayer needs to be linked with action. If the good fishermen of Banchory had sat at home and felt sorry for the fish stranded in the drying up pools of water, the fish would be dead now. No, they went out equipped with waders and buckets and nets and they got cold and wet and muddy and they saved the fish.

We can be fishers of men in our everyday lives. Every time we leave the house we meet people in the street, at the bus stop, in shops, at work, at college, wherever we might be. We don't always set out each day to consciously go fishing but God will give us opportunities to speak and act and live out our faith and so reach others.

Sometimes we might go out on a fishing expedition, on a mission, maybe doing something new and challenging and even a bit scary! A couple of examples.

Thomas Rusert is a pastor who believes that his main job is to take care of his people and he came to realise that sometimes his people were people he didn't know yet. And so he drinks coffee on Thursday mornings in his local Starbucks. He puts a little sign on the table that says "FREE PRAYER" in big letters and underneath in smaller letters it says "Pray and let God worry."

And people stop to pray with him every time.

One morning a stranger named Amari came in who had business that day at the local court. He looked at the little sign and said "Free prayer. What's that? Thomas explained that he offers free prayers to people every Thursday morning. Tears welled up in the man's eyes and he put his coffee and his papers on Thomas' table and walked outside. Thomas gathered up the things and went outside and invited the man to go for a walk. As they strolled together over the next hour, Thomas heard all the unuttered prayers and pains that Amari had held inside for two years. His wife had left him. A dear friend had died from a blood clot. An aunt had died from medical mistake. Another friend had died from an overdose. Finally, death had taken his sister. Death had hollowed out his spirit, and he had spoken about it to no one. Amari said "Then I read those words, 'Free Prayer and I couldn't keep it in anymore.'" It seemed that God had enacted an awakening, in this man's soul. And all Thomas had to do at first was sit there with his sign.

The bulk of Thomas' ministry is still among people within his congregation, but he is grateful for those free prayers at coffee shops each week. A schizophrenic woman who stopped and asked for prayer because she sees witches. They prayed together prayed for courage and strength and protection. An owner of a doughnut shop asked Thomas to pray for her shop. An old acquaintance asked for prayer for his nephew born three months early. The manager of Starbucks sat down at his table to share what God had been up to in her life.

In Thomas' own words, he said **"God has been up to a lot in my life**

through this Free Prayer ministry. While it has done admittedly little to expand the ranks of my congregation, it has done much to expand my vocation to include the ranks upon ranks of God's people I have never met who are searching for answers, waiting for comfort and willing to pray.

An Amari walks into a coffee shop every day in your town. I guarantee it. It may be a man or a woman, young or old, but an Amari is there. And he or she could really use some prayer. I set up my little sign to invite people to "pray, and let God worry" right where they are -- because the Amaris need prayer and aren't about to walk into church.

Sometimes, we have to move beyond the shadows of a steeple to take care of our people. And in so doing, we may just find that God takes care of us, too

A second example of fishing for men and women. A minister Ian took a group of people around Christmas to a local shopping centre in an area of Edinburgh where there is social deprivation. They took with them a long red carpet and they rolled it out in the middle of the shopping centre. They put down some brass poles linked with thick cord and so they had created the kind of red carpet you would see at a film premiere for the special people to walk on, the stars. Of course, people were curious and asked who the carpet was for. They were told it was for them because in God's eyes they were special and important. They were invited to walk along the red carpet, people clapped and cheered and they received a little gift. Some people felt a bit embarrassed to walk along, some danced and laughed and enjoyed the moment. One or two burst into tears. They were taken aside for a quiet chat and they revealed that no-one had ever told them they were special, they did not feel special, they could not believe that God loved them. One woman started going to the church café every week. She probably would never have found her way to the church if the fishing group had not gone out to meet her.

Jesus calls us today to be fishers of men and woman. This call is challenging and scary and exciting. We're not all going to sit in Costa at the Gyle with our little sign offering free prayer and we're not all going to roll out a red carpet in the Almondvale Centre – some of us might! – but we can be sure that God is able to use each one of us to reach men

and women who so need to find out that they are special and loved,
forgiven and redeemed.

AMEN