

LUKE 5:1-11
ST JAMES', 10.2.19, 11.00 am

INTRODUCTION

What a waste of fish! At the end of this passage, Simon, James and John abandon the biggest catch of fish they've ever seen. They just leave the fish to rot in their boats, and go off with this preacher, Jesus. The question is, 'why?' Once we've answered that, we also need to ask ourselves, 'what is Jesus saying to us, today?'

It may be helpful to realise that this is probably not the first time that Simon, James and John had met Jesus. John tells us how Andrew and another of the disciples of John the Baptist spent a day with Jesus (John 1:35-39), and that Andrew went to find his brother Simon and took him to meet Jesus. These events seem to have taken place after Jesus' temptations in the wilderness and before he returned to Galilee. In the case of James and John, it's highly probable that they were first cousins to Jesus (their mother Salome was probably the sister of Jesus' mother Mary), and that they'd therefore known each other since they were children. It looks as if Simon and Andrew were working in partnership with Zebedee and his sons in a fishing business on the lake, or Sea, of Galilee (which Luke calls the *Lake of Gennesaret*).

I AM A SINFUL MAN!

From our passage, it looks as if Simon was quite happy for Jesus to use his boat as a pulpit. He must have sat and listened to all Jesus had to say. But he isn't too impressed when Jesus tells him to go further out and let down his nets for a catch! Jesus may be the expert

when it comes to preaching; he may even be the expert carpenter. But when it comes to fishing, Simon's the expert! The best time to catch fish is at night, not in broad daylight. He and his partners have already been out all night, and so he knows that there just aren't any fish around. He's just about got his nets clean ready for his next fishing trip. And yet here's this carpenter-turned-preacher calmly telling him to go out and get the nets all mucky again, when there's absolutely no hope of catching anything!

But although it seems pointless, Simon chooses to obey Jesus' command. On the face of Luke's account, it's hard to tell why. Maybe he was already beginning to recognise that Jesus had some sort of supernatural powers or knowledge, even about fishing; or maybe Simon was beginning to recognise Jesus as someone special whom he wanted to please, whom he wanted to obey. Either way, in that earlier encounter mentioned in John 1, Jesus has already made a deep impression on Simon, which is reinforced during Jesus' sermon here in v 3.

We have lots of advantages over Simon Peter. We know exactly who Jesus is; we know he has supernatural powers and knowledge, and we know that he deserves our complete obedience. But how often do we choose to ignore his clear commands, because they seem to us to be pointless, or irrelevant, or out-of-date? We all know that Jesus summarised the Law like this: '*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind*', and, '*Love your neighbour as yourself*' (Luke 10:27). And yet

how often do we decide that God's Word, the Bible, has got something wrong, and we can safely ignore it? Many people who call themselves Christians do so today on issues concerning sex and marriage. And how often are we guilty of gossip, backbiting, and complaining amongst ourselves? If we loved each other, we'd forgive people for the times they've hurt us. If we loved each other, we'd lovingly tell people when we think they're failing to meet their obligations. Even if we don't get the results we want, it's not pointless. The point is that we're pleasing Jesus.

Simon Peter chose to obey, and the first result of his choice was that he caught a vast number of fish. More importantly, he recognised that Jesus wasn't just another carpenter, or just another preacher. Simon's reaction to Jesus was very similar to the way some great men in the OT had reacted when they'd found themselves in the presence of God. Isaiah's a good example. In our OT reading this morning we heard the story of his vision of the LORD, *seated on a throne, high and exalted*, with the seraphs constantly praising him. When Isaiah realised just whom and what he was seeing, he said this: *Woe to me! I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty* (Isaiah 6:1-5). In our story, like Isaiah, Simon realises how sinful and unworthy he is: *he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"*

DON'T BE AFRAID; FROM NOW ON YOU WILL CATCH MEN

Even today, Jesus is still making people aware of their sinfulness, of their unworthiness before God. It's only when we realise this for ourselves that Jesus can transform us. Here, he says to Simon, *Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men*; in other words, 'Don't worry; despite of your unworthiness, I can make something of you and use you; from now on you will catch men'. The skills that we already possess are the skills that Jesus wants us to use as we serve him; but he will transform those skills, and maybe use them in a different context. From this moment on, Simon's life was never the same again. If we want Jesus to take us, transform us, and use us to build his kingdom, then we need to learn the same lessons Simon learned here: to obey Jesus' commands, even when there doesn't seem to be any point to them; to confess our unworthiness before God; and to be prepared to leave everything behind, and follow Jesus.