

## **Miraculous Catch of Fish: The call of Peter, Luke 5:1-11**

**4th. Sunday before Lent, 10th February 2019, Isaiah 6:1-8, 1 Cor. 15:1-11**

### **Prayer +**

One of the joys of the Summer holidays when I was a young boy at Primary School in Lancaster, was a visit to the seaside at Morecambe. Although the distance travelled was only four miles, it was full of adventure for brother and me. First you caught the bus from Scotforth, where we lived, to Green Ayre railway station, so there was an opportunity to collect both Ribble bus numbers and train numbers. On arriving at Morecambe Promenade station, we would cross the road and throw ourselves on to the beach. "Now don't go out of your depth," mum would say. "I mean little chance of that", we thought, "the ripple ridged sands went on for ever." We would run in the shallows splashing each other with great joy. But mum was wiser than brother and me. She knew of accidents and deaths that had occurred on Morecambe sands with its killer tide, quicksands and sand bays that created huge channels. A well known place for fishing for Morecambe shrimps and cockles, the best pickings were right out in the middle of the Bay. But knowledge of the tide and perilous waters was vital for survival. Indeed it's fifteen years this week that over twenty Chinese cockle pickers tragically lost their lives in the waters of Morecambe Bay.

In this morning's Gospel Reading we meet Jesus preaching outside to the ordinary people, meeting them at their place of work. The crowds are surrounding him, keen to hear his words. Jesus, seeing a fishing boat on the shore of Galilee, got into it and asked Simon, the owner of the boat, who was washing his nets, to pull out a little way from the shore. It must have been quite a picture, Jesus preaching from the boat with the people pressing in on the shore. Simon, no doubt, continued washing his nets, wondering what on earth was happening. The story of the call of Jesus' first disciples is fitting for this season between Epiphany and Lent, a time in which the church continues to celebrate the gift of Jesus Christ as a manifestation of God, and gives thoughtful consideration to his mission to the world. God often becomes manifest in the mundane, even seemingly unnecessary, events of a person's life. He has this way of

stepping into our experience and turning our ordinary days into extraordinary ones. Notice at this stage of Luke's telling of Jesus' call of his first disciples, there is no mention of Andrew, Simon's brother, unlike the story in Matthew and Mark. Perhaps Luke, writing his gospel after Matthew and Mark, was making reference to Peter's role as the leader of the Church. There was an ancient image of the Church being tossed about, like a fishing boat, on the sea, but sustained by the presence of the Living God.

After Jesus had finished teaching the crowd, he turns to Peter and asks him to put out into deep water and let down his nets for a catch. Simon must have been amazed. Who was this man, coming into his own line of business, telling him how to catch fish? Like the experienced fishers of Morecambe Bay, he knew the best pickings were in deeper waters. But he also knew that it was at night when the best catches were made and, after all, they had worked all night long and caught nothing. It was probably with reluctance that Simon said, "If you say so, I will let down the nets." There follows a miraculous catch of fish so large that help is needed from James and John to haul it all aboard. The miracle is more than one should expect, as in the feeding of the 5000 or the wedding at Cana. Simon Peter's reaction is to go on his knees before Jesus and say, "Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man." Unworthiness in the presence of the divine is a common reaction.

Simon's calling echoes Scripture's accounts of the call of many OT prophets. In this morning's first reading Isaiah is called in the temple, where he works, as he experiences a great vision of the Lord. He also expresses his unworthiness, "Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips." But like Simon Peter, Isaiah answers our Lord's call, "Here am I, send me!" So it was with Moses when God called him while he was tending his sheep, Gideon while beating wheat and to Jeremiah in the temple. All initially resisted the call. Jeremiah with those wonderful words, "Ah, Lord God! Truly I do not know how to speak for I am only a boy." These biblical call stories take mortals from their usual tasks and direct them towards God's mission to the people. They are God-awakening moments.

As Christians we are all called to follow in Christ's footsteps, to act in his image, to spread the wonderful news of the Gospel and to bring to fruition the Kingdom of God. And if you consider yourself not quite good enough for God, not sufficiently holy or prayerful, too weak in faith; if your thoughts are "I'll leave that building of the Kingdom of God stuff to others better qualified" well then you are in good company for so it was with Simon, with Isaiah, with Moses, with Jeremiah. The people who speak for God, the people who spread the Gospel have unclean lips; we are people of unclean lips, but we are made clean again by the presence of the love and grace of God. So how can we answer his call? How can we recognise the nature of the call and those God-awakening moments?

When Jesus calls he certainly does demand everything, but only because he has already given everything himself. As with Simon Peter he asks us to "put out into deep waters." Don't we often respond like Simon. It's pleasant in the shallows - brother and I knew that - we can see the bottom, we feel comfortable in the shallows. But God calls us to deeper waters where we love our enemies, feed the hungry, clothe the poor, give abundantly, visit the homeless, forgive extravagantly. Deep water is dark, it's over our heads, we need courage and faith. But it's in deep water where we make the miraculous catch which God has in store for us with plans that we would never have dreamed of. "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? And I said, "Here am I; send me," Malcolm Guite expresses these thoughts succinctly:

"He calls us all to step aboard his ship  
Take the adventure on this morning's wing  
Raise sail with him, launch out into the deep  
Whatever storms or floods are threatening."

Bill Pattinson  
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