

Do The Next Thing Right (Luke 5:1-11)

10:00am Holy Communion – 9th February 2025

Luke 5:1-11

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. 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.

1 Corinthians 15

Now I should remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news that I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you—unless you have come to believe in vain.

For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures, and that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers and sisters at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to someone untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me. Whether then it was I or they, so we proclaim and so you have come to believe.

<prayer>

I have one thing in common with the President of the United States of America, and I'm ashamed to admit it. I once established three hotels on Mayfair. A single visit would cost you £1,500. However, to be a hotel magnate was not an instant achievement. To get there I had to start small, speculating on property on buying and selling, grabbing all I could with high rents so that could run my own filthy tenements on the Old Kent Road, never missing an opportunity to stockpile cash until I could claw my way up the backs of everyone else, in some mania to make money by leaving everyone else either penniless or deep in debt. **I warn you - don't ever challenge me to a game of monopoly.**

Actually, there are some who do live this way, or a form of it. It was clearly there in biblical times too according to the voices of many prophets, and Jesus himself. *Just like the game, you can compete and accumulate, but in the end all we are just ends up in the box.*

We all maintain some measurable in our lives. Why not money? Others count their social media friends, likes, or hits. Perhaps you have a view of yourself in terms of your level of trendiness, or handicap (golf I mean) or the things you surround yourself with (I do it too). I spent twenty years in the city of London, working on IT projects when the Dot-Com bubble was still inflating. These were the bad old days of the early nineties – sleaze and yuppies, weak regulation, and when financial recessions were just an occupational hazard. I often joke that switching from the financial sector into church ministry is thirty-years repentance, to work-off the sins of my former years. I am of course overplaying it a bit, but it's half-true, and not just for me either.

The Christian faith is a wonderful thing in that it carries within it the hope of change and a new start. Whatever your life has been, your next step can always bring you closer to Jesus Christ, closer to hope, closer to making a difference wherever you are.

Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets.

The apparently simple story of the miraculous catch of fish holds profound truths. This gospel story today is in the classic style of Luke – it's clear and lucid - easy to imagine. Have you ever been fishing? The problem is that you can't actually see where the fish are, so you have to decide *where to fish*. That is the fisherman's key skill. Whether it's rod and line from the shore, or nets from a boat, you cannot escape the doubt: *'are there any fish here to catch? Maybe I'm in the wrong place?'* Of course, you want a result, lots of fish please, but no amount of time or effort can catch fish that are not there. Your only result might be emptiness and failure, a stark reminder of time wasted. Maybe that time could have been better spent doing something else? Even for those fishermen in Galilee catching nothing meant you still have the toil and rigmarole of washing your nets. The boat just floated there uselessly, waiting for some good purpose.

Jesus got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat.

We are not told what Jesus taught the crowd that day, but afterward in his characteristic way, he makes a special focus on those disciples. He can't be sure how much the crowd understood, but Jesus can be sure to reinforce the message to those few, perhaps only four of them. To

demonstrate he must now slightly embarrass them in front of the crowd, all those standing close upon the shore. Jesus couldn't sail a boat or fish, but he claims the greatest decision for any fisherman – *where to fish*.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.'

With Luke here, the meaning lies plainly on the surface, floating next to the boat for all to see, as it were. Jesus gains the attention and trust of the fishermen with his amazingly good fishing advice, resulting in a great catch to enrich them and feed their families.

When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink.

So many fish have they caught that now their boat, and their lives which depend on it, began to sink. **If ever there was an example in scripture of 'greed takes you down', then this is it.** Nevertheless, I'm sure they would have tried to repeat the whole exercise in the same spot the following day, trying to catch even more, and sinking down even further. **Isn't that how fortune normally works – 'I've got lots but now I'd like some more please.'** We can't blame the fishermen because that was all they could do, or so they thought. Fishing seemed like their sole skill - progress for them was just catching more. **Their only next step in life was to go out there are try to do it all again.** That was Peter's life.

But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken.

When Jesus arrives, he breaks the cycle and provides an alternative to them. The story is quite plain. Peter tries and fails to drag along the weight of his sinful life, just like the huge and unmanageable catch of fish. To Peter it is proof of his unworthiness, yet Jesus pays no attention to his past failings at all. **Jesus is only interested in helping Peter make the next step right.**

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.

I know of no equivalent in this worldly life that compares to the message of hope and new life which we find in Jesus Christ. More cash, more power, more trendiness, more friends – they just don't count in the heart. These things just float on the surface and are carried away by the winds of life. You might come back the next day for more, but they are gone.

I think it helps in our Christian lives – *as we live now* - to know that we have had to make that next step right - towards Jesus Christ. If, in all our years, we can remember a point when we made a commitment, that it felt like new life, leaving our old selves behind, then such a memory will constantly remind us that we do have that strength of faith. And we may find in later life that such faith is needed again and again in times of difficulty, when we are tempted to slide back into our own inadequate strength.

Jesus gave that 'next step right' opportunity to only a few at first, just four fishermen in the gospel to begin with, but then came the rest of the twelve disciples, then a group of seventy, then five-hundred, then more and now billions around the world. **All because Peter made his next step right.**

It does not matter who you are now, or what you have done, you can still have a new life and a new purpose. That moment is just one footstep in front of you. God's grace is more than enough to cope with the past, and take you onwards.

Sin has no monopoly on us.

Amen