

The Faithful Fisherman
A Sermon by Mr. Tom Mason
Sunday 6th February 2022

Luke 5:1-11; 1 Cor 15:1-11; Isa 6:1-7

This morning's scripture from the Gospel of Luke, is a story about fishing. Although I am a keen novice fly fisherman, I do not know much about fishing.

My wife Terry does know about fishing, as she grew up in her mother and fathers fly in fishing resorts.

I have heard lots of fishing stories, stories that in nearly all cases and circumstances, always flatters the fisherman.

The monster fish that got away, the fish that almost pulled the boat to the shore, or this rod and bait that just makes the fish jump on to the hook.

I am sure that many of you have heard these famous stories before and have experienced the joy of an exciting day of catching a fish on the water.

The Bible tells us a different type of fishing story in the Gospel of Luke this morning. The story is about fishermen coming up empty without a catch after fishing all night. A serious outcome.

The story is also about a carpenter who takes over their boat, who preaches a sermon and who then directs and tells the fishermen exactly where and when to go to catch fish. Can you imagine this today, an unexpected person appears who directs you to a fishing spot, where you are guaranteed to catch not just one fish, but many, many more. More fish than you could ever have imagined, even in a yarn of a fishing tale.

After hundreds of pounds of fish have been finally caught, one of the men who was present, Simon, makes a life changing decision, he decides to give up and quit his job fishing for fish, and he starts to fish for people. He decides to follow Jesus and to become his disciple.

This is a different kind of fishing story. Perhaps the story tells us not just of fishing, but it also teaches us why the fish don't bite, why some people don't catch fish.

Some people do not catch fish because they will not go into deeper water. In Cayman where there are many fishermen, they always head out to the seven mile or thirteen- mile bank, far offshore through deep open waters to favoured spots that are jealously guarded with GPS coordinates, spots that can take three to four hours on fast powerful boats to get to.

This is what Jesus told Simon, "Lets leave the shallows and go to the deep".

It is only in the deep water that schools of the big fish may be found. The first rule of fishing (According to Terry my wife) is that you must go to the place where the fish are. Jesus was teaching us a spiritual principle, one that is not just limited to fish.

We could substitute fish for abundance or wisdom or love, for healing or for peace. All these things we seek in our lives and pray for in abundance.

Some people never catch these things because they simply refuse to go deep. To take the chance, to overcome fear refusing simply to go deeper.

Deep water is where the increase may be found. Deep water takes faith. Deep water is a risk, it can place us in a vulnerable position, beyond our control and dependent on natural forces. Focus and a commitment of both the mind and the heart are needed and required to enter the deep water.

The visibility in deep black waters is next to nothing. You must trust the words and directions of others who have passed through the deep water to make it there.

Our New Testament reading from 1 Cor 15:1-11 seems to amplify this passage into the deep, a place where trust and directions from others not only matter, but which are vital. The apostle Paul reminds the Corinthians of the gospel, which he has preached to them, which they have received and in which they stand; and for them to "hold fast in the word" Paul tells them to remain faithful in Christ.

Jesus is inviting people to go deeper, to reach for the deeper end of things.

But shallow water is pleasant. Shallow water is not dangerous, shallow water is warm and seems to embrace us. It gently covers our feet; we can feel the comforting sand underneath and we can observe small fish and shells clearly. It is a wonderful thing to paddle or swoosh about in warm, clear, shallow water.

This is not where the large schools of fish swim or exist.

Staying in the shallow water can become such a great temptation. Shallow water does not cost much, it does not take a lot of courage to venture into.

But Simon knew that the minnows in the shallows could not feed him. They could not fill him. The minnows were not the desire of his fishermen's heart.

The deep water of faith is where those things we say we want are swimming around.

The shallow water is where we enter from the shore to begin our adventure, it is where start from, it not where a life of Christian discipleship rooted in faith finishes or may truly be found.

There is a time in our Christian journey for classes and listening, for teaching and for a reflective understanding.

There is also a time to live what we have learned. A time to reach out. A time to witness and for actions of love towards others.

There is a time to receive and a time to give sacrificially, a time to worship the Lord in church, and a time to be church and to lead others in the world to worship the Lord.

Our old- testament reading from Isaiah 6 this morning 8-13 shares with us the commissioning of Isaiah from the Lord, "whom shall I send and who will go for us?" says the Lord, Isaiah responds, "Here I am Lord, send me". Isaiah headed for the deep water, trusting in God.

Deep water is where we as Christians have go to catch what God has for us.

Some people don't catch fish, the fish don't bite on their hooks because they simply do not expect to catch a fish. When Jesus tells Simon, "Lets go to the deep water" he does not stop there. Jesus said, "Prepare for a catch", what an incredible encouragement.

Many of us go to church regularly. Week after week we go to the deep water of worship, but do we go preparing and expecting a catch?

Do we go believing that a blessing is just waiting for us? Or do we go to appease a spouse or to be seen by others, or just out of habit?

Expectations count with God; it is all over the Bible. God calls, people respond, and things happen.

Expectation is the first-born child of faith. "The substance of things hoped for" (Heb 11:1). No expectation = no real faith.

When we say we believe in God, we are not saying I am agreeing with some abstract idea; we proclaim that we expect the things that God, our faithful God has promised us. The forgiveness of sins and the gift of eternal life.

We are saying that we are partners with the "giver of all good gifts". And among those gifts God has promised us are fruitfulness and fish and forever.

Jesus keeps pushing Simon's boundaries. "Leave the shore Simon". "Go into the deep Simon". These are easy in comparison to "Simon, expect a blessing". Jesus was calling Simon to risk being disappointed in God.

1. Some people don't catch fish because they don't go out to the deep water,
2. And some people don't catch fish because they don't expect to.
3. But some people don't catch fish because they know more about fish than God.

Simon almost makes this mistake. He tells Jesus with what seems like an exasperated, certainly frustrated tone, "Hey we have been fishing all night. We know fish. The fish don't run in the day. You're a carpenter, preaching to us?"

Some people think they know more about fish than God, it happens to us all at time. Its not that we know more than God; its just that it seems that we behave that way.

We hear God's instructions: Forgive others, love they neighbor, bless those who curse you, give abundantly, reach out to others. Forget your self, remember the Sabbath, it is for worship.

We ignore God's invitation to abundance, to go into the deep and to catch all the fish in the world. This tests our faith.

We say to God through our actions; I know more about marriage, more about healing, more about forgiveness, more about relationships, more about money than you do, God.

Simon just for a split second, almost forgot that God is God. Today's culture seems to have little use for the word humility, from the time of the enlightenment our western culture told itself that through science and human power, that we could know everything. Our information highway and 5g networks of today, seem to be repeating this process again.

Simon at that crucial intersection. One which we all come face to face with, "over and over" again in life, decided that he did not know everything, he was willing to take a risk with faith, his present emptiness and frustration had made him ready to learn. It was from this position that he found his humility.

Many people say that the net full of fish is the miracle of this story. I believe that the real miracle of this story is that Simon decided that God was God and that he would place God in his heart and at the center of his life. Simon is the faithful fisherman.

Just look at what Simon says before the miracles begin to happen, "Yet, Lord if you say so...", My frustration, my pain, my emptiness is real, Lord. And yet, you are God, not I.

That's when our miracles will begin to happen, that's when we will start catching fish, when we decide that God is God, when our lips and our minds

agree that "God's foolishness is wider than any human wisdom", and His will and not mine shall be done. This is when we become the faithful fishermen.

Let us pray together.

Set us free, O God, from the bondage of our sins and give us the liberty of that abundant life through our faith which you have made known to us in your Son, our Saviour Jesus Christ, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever more, Amen.