



Luke 5:8–11

8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.' 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Reflection

Jesus certainly has a good knack when it comes to his sermon illustrations. Invariably he draws them from the lives of everyday working people – farmers sowing seed, shepherds tending sheep, the birds of the air, the lillies in the field, servants and their masters, fathers and their delinquent sons, bridegrooms and their brides, guests at weddings, and today, fishermen hard at work with their nets. Jesus was in touch with common people because he was a common person. Born not in a palace, but in a stable. Growing up not in Jerusalem but in a small town from the wrong side of the tracks called Nazareth. Trained not as a rabbi or a priest, but as a carpenter. If God in his wisdom ordained

for the greater part of humanity to spend most of their life working ordinary secular jobs then it should come as no surprise to us that Jesus spent as many as 25 years working with hammers and nails and only three years in public ministry. Jesus was one of us and his sermon illustrations show us just how intimately familiar he was with the struggles and pressures, joys and burdens of everyday ordinary people.

Yet there was far more to Jesus than powerfully intuitive preaching. As we discussed earlier in the week it wasn't Jesus preaching that has seen him grow over the last 2,000 years to become the most influential human being of all time. With average life expectancies in the Roman world of 20–25 years of age, with infant mortality at one in two, with wars and famines

and plagues commonplace, and with the biggest killer in the ancient world being a common fever, what has caused Jesus' name to endure were his extraordinary miracles, the highest volume of which were his miraculous healings, and the pinnacle of which was his own resurrection from the dead. Jesus' preaching was punctuated by the miraculous. People sat up and took notice, came to hear him from far and wide, because of his miracles. Which Luke shows us right from the outset in the call of Jesus' first disciples, four fishermen, Peter, his brother Andrew and their business partners, James and John. I'll read yesterday's passage and today's together, to see the powerful effect Jesus' miracle had on Peter and Jesus' adept use of the occasion to illustrate Peter's call into ministry. So, reading from Luke 5:1–8,

5 One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding round him and listening to the word of God. 2 He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. 3 He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat. 4 When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.' 5 Simon answered, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.' 6 When they

had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. 7 So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink. 8 When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!' 9 For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, 10 and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.' 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Very likely there were several hundred witnesses to this miracle but Luke pans in on one individual – Peter. In the general astonishment, whooping and laughing, and thoughts of riches at market, one man falls at Jesus’ knees. Peter had heard Jesus preach in the synagogue and seen him heal his mother-in-law, but for Jesus to so fully invade Peter’s world – his sea, his boat, his nets – for him to so powerfully and personally minister inside Peter’s profession, his day to day reality for the greater part of his adult life, and so powerfully demonstrate his authority; the significance of what Jesus has been doing and saying washes over Peter like never before. His reaction? Not worship, or philosophical contemplation, or a request for a repeat performance but

‘Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!’

Peter’s reaction is holy fear, and conviction of sin. A reaction we see time and time again in the Old Testament when one is confronted with the holiness of God. You see, when a sinful human being comes into the presence of a holy and perfect God, the distance is too great; the contrast too damning; God’s light too bright for our darkness to do anything but recede. Listen to the prophet Isaiah’s reaction to the presence of God. When he ‘saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne’ (Isa 6:1) his first thought wasn’t worship but,

5 ‘Woe to me!’ I cried. ‘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.' Isa 6:5

Something akin to this came over Peter as he came face to face with the power and holiness of God on his home turf: those nets he daily cleaned and mended by hand, those waters he knew with such intimacy, those boats he'd grown up in so powerfully and completely taken over and abundantly blessed by the one standing in front of him who taught with nature-altering authority.

'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!'

But of course Jesus had exactly the opposite in mind; as is true for every truly repentant person who encounters him.

Verses 10 & 11,

Then Jesus said to Simon, ‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.’ 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

And here we have Jesus’ sermon illustration I was talking about earlier which so perfectly encapsulates discipleship and mission, or to join the two together, the perfect illustration of Christian ministry.

‘Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.’ 11 So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Fishing for people. And we aren’t talking

Shimano and a speedboat. In Peter's day, fishing was back-breaking work, up all night, laying out a great net in a semi-circle, more than 30 metres in diameter, then drawing it in, hand-over-hand, then repeating the procedure over and over again. That's Christian ministry. It's hard, repetitive, often seemingly against-all-the-odds type -of-work. Like fishing. Billions of megalitres of water and a few, elusive fish, coming up empty handed time and time again, the results often so painfully disproportionate to the effort involved. But when you catch one – the excitement, the joy, the elation – and somehow it is all worthwhile. And when God gets involved, nets filled to bursting, you can't help but acknowledge and be reminded that all the credit and glory for this miracle is due to him.

Think & Pray

And so to close this week consider this illustration from Jesus. From now on you will fish for people. And also consider Peter's reaction. Do you fall down on your knees when confronted by the holiness of God? Have you left every hallmark of your former way of life behind now that you follow him? Do you fish for people with the discipline and regularity and the sweat of the ancient fisherman? Are you trusting in your own strength to win people for Christ?

Meditate over these questions to close out this week. And then pray for bursting nets and the courage to follow Peter's example today.