



Matthew 4:18–20

18 As Jesus was walking beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 19 “Come, follow me,” Jesus said, “and I will send you out to fish for people.” 20 At once they left their nets and followed him.

In our passage today we find Jesus walking alongside the Sea of Galilee. As Matthew’s

gospel unfolds we see that much of Jesus' ministry happens in this area. So it's worth spending a moment now setting the scene.

The Sea of Galilee was an inland sea, so it's often called a lake. It's located about 100kms north of Jerusalem, in the great Jordan rift valley, about 650 feet below sea level. The Jordan river enters the lake in the north and exits in the south. It then flows a further 110kms south, down past where John was baptising in the river Jordan, in Judea, and then out into the Dead Sea. But the Sea of Galilee couldn't be more different from the Dead Sea. It was teeming with life. It had fresh water, clear sandy beaches, and pleasant temperatures. And importantly for our passage today, it was well stocked with fish. However there was one catch for the fisherman. It was surrounded by mountain rang-

es to the east and west, mountains that rose almost 3000 feet above the lake, and so its low lying setting could result in sudden and violent storms.

So Jesus is walking along on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee and he sees two men, Simon Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea. Fish were plentiful in the lake and there were good markets to sell them at. It was a cosmopolitan area, with soldiers, and pilgrims and people peddling their wares, always coming and going, along with the local population, so fish were always in demand. Fishing was hard work, and sometimes dangerous, especially considering those storms, but you could earn a decent living from it.

So picture Jesus walking along and seeing Simon Peter and his brother Andrew casting a

net into the sea. They were probably standing knee deep in water and expertly throwing (through years of practice) a circular net, about 7 metres in diameter, weighed down by lead sinkers right around the edge. It was hard physical work, casting over and over again, trying to net a few fish in the shallow waters.

Jesus calls out to them, 'Come, follow me,' and immediately they leave their nets, and their livelihoods, behind; they leave everything and follow him.

Now it's important to note here that both Andrew and Peter had a prior relationship with Jesus. It's easy to miss this in Matthew but from John's gospel we learn that Andrew was one of two disciples who left John the Baptist to follow Jesus. And the first thing Andrew did

was go and tell his brother Peter about Jesus. And so it's very likely that both Andrew and Peter had accompanied Jesus throughout his first year of ministry. You'll remember that Matthew only focusses on the second two years of Jesus' ministry. The first year of his ministry, which was relatively low key, is only detailed in John's gospel. Jesus ministered in a low-key kind of way in Judea, his ministry overlapping for a year with John the Baptist's ministry. When John was thrown in prison, Jesus headed north, to Galilee and started his second year of ministry which was far more public in nature.

So for some reason we find that Peter and Andrew had gone back to fishing, perhaps they'd never fully left it. But they'd had plenty of time to get to know Jesus, and to consider his mission. And yet none of this should

downplay their response to Jesus' call. Jesus says, 'Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men' and immediately they leave their nets, and their livelihoods behind, they leave everything and follow Jesus. This wasn't a spur of the moment emotional decision, it was hard thought-out, they were waiting for his call, and when it came they jumped at it, but the sacrifice was still as high – they left everything.

But the question still presents itself doesn't it? Why give it all up to follow a wandering preacher? And we could ask the same question of people today. Why did this person give up a promising career in investment banking to become a minister? Why did that couple sell their house and move to a third world country to become missionaries? What caused this person to so dramatically downgrade their

lifestyle when they became a Christian – and never be more happy? The answer, then and today, is the same – they gave it all up for Jesus and his mission. His magnetism and his mission.

There they are, knee deep in water, in the middle of a hard day's work, a handful of fish jumping around in their nets. And then Jesus calls out with such presence and authority, 'Come, follow me, leave off your fishing and I'll make you fishers of men.' (quoting an older, catchier version of the bible). We can feel the power of Jesus' presence and personality through his words even today. 2000 years later we're spending an entire year considering him every day of the week, 6 days like this and then on Sundays in church – all on the strength of his words. Can you imagine what he was like in person? His magnetism,

his authority, his power? And then there's his kingdom, the promise of his mission on earth. Come and become kingdom workers, come and make disciples of all nations, come and I'll make you fishers of men.

For some the call of Jesus is something that happens slowly, over time. For others it may be sudden and dramatic. For most of us, it's something in between. But wherever you're at, whatever nets your casting, whatever is occupying you at the moment, in the end Jesus has a way of getting through. Perhaps you're feeling his call particularly at the moment. This needn't mean up and leaving everything, God's has scattered us right throughout his world so that there is a Christian presence almost everywhere. Almost certainly there is kingdom work to be done in your workplace, in the suburb you live in, and in the friend-

ship groups that God has carefully placed you in. But equally, this may mean up and leaving everything, trusting Jesus with your whole heart and putting your whole future into his hands.

Just two years later, one of these fisherman, knee deep in water and a handful of fish at his feet, would stand up in the heart of Jerusalem and preach fearlessly to thousands. And on that day three thousand people would be cut to the heart and give their lives over to Jesus. They were so affected they cried out, 'Brothers what shall we do?', and Peter's reply was 'Repent and be baptised every one of you' and 3,000 of them did in that very moment, and the Christian church was born. That moment began with Peter thinking over quietly at work how he was going to respond to Jesus' call. And your moment might begin

today as you think over at work today how you're going to respond to Jesus' call.

That's enough from me. I'm going to leave you now to think and pray over this passage. And tomorrow we'll see another couple of young men make a similar sacrifice.