

Revd Anne Hoad's Sermon delivered at St Andrew's on 10 February 2019

4th Sunday before Lent. 1 Corinthians 15, 1 - 11 Luke 5 1 - 11

St Paul, in his Epistle writes "The facts are that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that He was buried, that He was raised to life on the third day"

Jesus died for our sins. Jesus was not crucified for being a good citizen, for being a little nicer than everyone else. The powers of His day correctly identified Him and His followers as subversives because they took their orders from a higher authority than Rome or Jerusalem.

What was their power? "Power without love is reckless and abusive" said Martin Luther King. "Power at its best is love implementing the rewards of justice."

What about the Gospel? A crowd gathered on the shore of the lake, jostling for the best vantage points, talking about what this new prophet might say or do next.

Jesus teaches from Peter's boat because of the crush. He is with rough and ready fishermen who know their trade. He speaks to Simon who tells Him that they have been straining every sinew throughout the night and their nets have come up empty. Jesus tells them to put out into the deep water and let down their nets for a catch. Simon Peter explains that there is nothing to be caught, but, against his better instincts, he says "If you say so, I will let down the nets."

Simon, without expectation, trusts Jesus and goes ahead in spite of the unlikely prospect of success. The moment of trust, whereby we relinquish control and let go to God, makes us intensely vulnerable. I have been greatly helped by the work of the Chris Chapman Trust. Trust means we give what we have and who we are and leave the rest to God. Peter responds by listening, setting aside his doubts, and hearing the voice of God. He is drawn into depths beyond our fathoming and into work that is more than we feel able to do. Throwing out the nets, we are led from control of the situation into the vulnerability of trust, from independence to interdependence and sharing.

With Simon Peter we are travelling from the known to the unknown, moving from constriction to liberty, from fear to love. Only in trust, responding to the call of the Master, will we begin to unravel the mystery of who we are and who God is, who summons us into life. We can begin to let go of our anxiety about our worth and whether we succeed or fail, or how much we are in control of what happens. But through openness to God in prayer, through development of trust and the sharing of hopes, fears and desires, we can become like the huge catch, an ever-expanding surprise, becoming more than we are now.

The growth of faith, hope and love within us, asks that we sometimes act what we do not feel, like Peter. We dare to let God lead us even though we are unsure of the path. We co-operate with God in working for new beginnings, though we struggle to see beyond the empty sea, the brokenness of this place. The Master says "Cast the net" and persuades us to release our tight grip on what confines and diminishes us, and instead take hold of what is unfamiliar, enduring and trustworthy love.

We are made for the giving and receiving of relationship and no other way can satisfy us. So God's action, on behalf of Peter, and on our behalf, invites us into

life, drawing us from the shadows, and working with us to enable growth like the sensational catch.

The other thing to notice, besides trust, is that all the fishermen work together. "So they signalled to their partners....all his companions were amazed at the catch"

They call to each other for help. We need to share the Gospel and to work together. If we let the stories touch us, it is more likely that we will change our behaviour and consider what is happening to others. That way there is both a greater sharing and a greater accountability for our actions.

The origins of the Scriptures were stories passed down and shared orally among communities. By reading and listening to the Scriptures together, as well as reading them alone, we will see how Jesus's actions impress on us now togetherness and community. We grow both *through* relationships and *into* relationships. Abiding in the goodness of God, our inner being flourishes in ways that bring life to those around us. Salvation is not a possession an individual might claim as his own; it is a community of people moving towards wholeness through the love that is shared between them.

God comes by invitation only, not in the violence to compel us to obey. The barriers to growth are real. Hope is the capacity to look without flinching at how things are and yet imagine how much more they can become.

Jesus is the one who bears God's unique authority and power to create fruitfulness as evidence of the increase in God's Kingdom.

Peter's reaction to the huge catch is instructive. He has already seen something of Jesus. Jesus has visited his house and healed his mother-in-law. However, after the catch of fish, something changes in Peter's perception and he sees something of who and what Jesus really is. It is a kind of self-revelation of God, the awareness not only of seeing, but being seen. "Go Lord, leave me, sinner that I am." Like Peter we have a sense of smallness, of unworthiness, as if before a great searching light; we are exposed to the glare of this vast unconditional love. It reminds me of Justin Welby, who, when asked whether and how he had had experiences and encounters with God, replied that he had and they were always shown in love, and that's my experience too.

"They left everything and followed Him." We develop through struggle and success. Becoming a priest or a religious were considered the vocations, and sometimes teaching and nursing were described as vocational careers. But vocation applies to us all. The question is "What is your invitation to me at this time?" The Spirit's presence is shown in everyone - no-one is left out.

There is an essential goodness and rightness in our individual identity. We are called to serve God as the people we are. We often downplay what we can offer, but, following Christ, we are invited to take a step in response to the best others see in us. At the end of this Gospel passage, Jesus's last words are "Do not be afraid. From now on you will be bringing people to me." Do not be afraid.