

18.06.17 Sermon – Luke 5:1-11

Introduction

140 years ago, on June 13 1878 the Foundation Stone was laid for the first building on this site. There was a full report of the ceremony in the Bay of Plenty Times.

- The event took place on a Thursday afternoon at 3 o'clock.
- 'The weather was superb, and there was a very large attendance of all denominations on the ground'
- 'The minister in the course of a lengthy address explained the constitution and Government of the Presbyterian Church, under the name of the Kirk Session, Presbyteries, Provincial Synods, and General Assemblies.' (Do not be afraid, that is not going to happen today)
- There were many Reverend's in attendance. The article explains that, 'after the block had been well rammed, the reverend gentlemen declared it to be 'well and truly laid' and re-ascending the platform delivered a short address, congratulating the members of the Presbyterian Church in Tauranga on the prospect of shortly worshipping God within the walls of their own church, and urging them to persevere in the work which they had so well begun.'
- In the evening there was a soiree in the Temperance Hall where tables were 'tastefully arranged, and all 'groaning' under the good things of this life.'
- The article concludes, 'thus...a red-letter day in the annals of the Presbyterian Church in Tauranga, and one of great interest to all right thinking men'.

Later that year, in November, a handsome kauri Kirk flung wide its doors.

Several generations have passed since our forebears settled in this place, driving the first foundation stone deep into the earth. This site stands at a crossroads, on a city corner where conflict and cleansing meet – Cameron Road and Spring Street. We are placed on a peninsula at the edge of Tauranga Moana, a peaceful harbour, a safe anchorage. It is no surprise that our buildings are named after St Peter; the great fisherman, the rock on whom Christ would build his Church. Here, in the heart of Tauranga Moana stands a monument dedicated unto the Lord – the Prince of Peace.

For 140 years the people of St Peters have gathered in worship and service, planting churches and establishing new ministry initiatives. We have a strong commitment to Christian formation through biblical teaching, discipleship, care for the poor and love for our neighbour. This year, in the year 2018, we are reaffirming that we are called to mission and ministry activity in this place. Our service is anchored in the firm hope that Jesus Christ comes to dwell among us and calls us to follow him.

Last Sunday Simon McLeay (not Simon Peter) shared how we are beginning a period of prayer and fasting. A time when together we will discuss, discern and consider how God is calling us to minister, to serve, and to love, our neighbour, our city, both within these walls and beyond them. During this time you will receive a pamphlet explaining where we have come from, where we are now, and asking where are we going in the future? You can engage with this content and these questions in your small groups. There will also be a number of ways you can share your thoughts, ideas and reflections.

We have had a small committee working on this since March. During the 40 days of reflection, fasting and prayer a committee member will visit you in your Small Group to have a discussion session and get your feedback and commitment to the vision. If you are not in a Small Group then there will be a Sunday afternoon discussion session for those that wish to share their thoughts on the future. This will end with a Commitment Sunday where your talents, skills and resources can be committed to the next phase of our church's journey.

As we participate in these 40 days of discernment we are also beginning a series looking at the life of Peter – our namesake.

In the 1960's the solid old kauri church was shifted a few yards and a new a steel and brick structure was put in it's place, complete with a 16-foot blue cross and 4 8-foot stained glass windows depicting the life of St Peter.

These windows tell the stories of:

1. Peter's call to follow Christ
2. Peter's confession that Jesus is the Christ
3. Peter at the empty tomb after Jesus' resurrection
4. Peter at Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended and dwelt in the followers of Jesus.

Over the next 40 days we will be reflecting on these four stories which are foundational stories for us. In the life and ministry of Peter we see something of our own call, our own confession, our own awe and wonder at God's miraculous power, and our own encounter with the Holy Spirit.

The Scene

Peter's Call to discipleship, to follow Jesus, is recorded slightly differently in each of the Gospels. Today Jon read Luke's account to us. I picked Luke because it gives the most detail about the encounter, however, we need to read the other three accounts to get the fullest picture of what is happening here.

The scene is set at Lake Gennesaret. You may remember from two weeks ago that Lake Gennesaret is a *large, shadowy body of water* known also as the Sea of Galilee. There are a number of small villages scattered around the water's edge. Several of Jesus' disciples come from these villages. Simon Peter is one of them.

In these 11 verses Simon is named 5 times. One of these times he is named Simon Peter. That's for our benefit. Later in Luke's gospel Jesus gives Simon the name Peter. Luke refers to it here in Chapter 5 to help us out so that we know it's the same person.

John's Gospel, on the other hand, goes straight into it in the first chapter. Verse 42 tells us that Simon is brought to Jesus by his brother Andrew. 'Jesus looked at him and said, 'You are Simon, son of John. You will be called Cephas' (which, when translated, is Peter).'

In both Matthew and Mark we get the impression that when Jesus says, 'Come, follow me' to Simon and a few other fishermen it is the first time they are encountering Jesus. This is where the other gospel accounts help us out.

John tells us that Andrew hears John the Baptist say of Jesus, 'look, the Lamb of God!' and heeds Jesus' call to come. 'The first thing Andrew did was to find his brother Simon and tell him, 'we have found the Messiah' (that is, the Christ).'

(John 1:41)

In Luke 4 (prior to Peter's Call in Chapter 5) we are told that Jesus goes to the home of Simon because his mother-in-law is suffering from a high fever and he is asked to help her. Jesus heals her.

What this tells us is that Simon has had previous encounters with Jesus prior to his call to discipleship. His call to follow is not an isolated event. It is a part of a journey. It is a development.

The Man

Interestingly, Simon Peter's story embodies our mission statement: *helping people find, follow and know Jesus*. It is Simon's brother, Andrew, who helps him to find Jesus. After this initial encounter, Simon Peter witnesses Jesus' miraculous power when his mother-in-law is healed, and when the abundance of fish is hauled into the boat.

Next, Jesus' calls Simon Peter to follow which he does obediently and immediately.

Later, along this journey of discipleship, this following the way of Jesus, Simon Peter demonstrates that at times he really does know Jesus. When Jesus asks his disciples, 'who do you say that I am?' Simon Peter says, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God'.

Simon Peter also demonstrates at other times that he doesn't really know Jesus. Like when Jesus is washing the disciples feet and Simon Peter says, 'wash my whole body' and Jesus says it's not really necessary and you've kind of missed the point. Or when Jesus is on trial before his resurrection and the servant girl asks Simon Peter if he knows Jesus and he says he doesn't.

Like all of us, Simon Peter is human. He is prone to doubt, and to bouts of impulse and passion. Like all of us, Simon Peter is helped to find, called to follow, and eager to know Jesus.

Simon Peter is human. He is a brother, a husband, a son-in-law, a fisherman and a Galilean.

The Call

As I mentioned earlier, Simon Peter's call to discipleship doesn't come as an isolated incident. He has previous encounters with Jesus which help prepare him to respond in the way that he did.

This is good news for me because I took years to respond to Jesus' call to discipleship, to become a follower.

This is good news for us when we are praying for those we know and love to come to know Jesus. This is good news for us when we are praying for our enemies to come to know Jesus. This is good news for us when we spend years living our lives of faith in the hope that our words and actions are a testimony to God's goodness and grace.

We, and those around us, may encounter Jesus in many and varied ways before the call to come and follow is heeded.

Simon Peter's call narrative is quite miraculous. Ours may not be. Our stories of coming to faith may not include a sinking boat full of fish. For some of us, our stories may seem to be mundane and every-day, a series of steady stepping stones, but our stories are no less real and transformative. For others of us, our stories of coming to faith involve unexplained healing, or sudden life changes, or dramatic rescues, or vivid encounters – real and transformative.

Luke's account of Simon Peter's call has similarities with those of the prophets, and others.

1. There is a physical, tangible presence of God in a burning bush, or a vision of the temple, or an angel in white, or even, God in the flesh.
2. There is an initial reluctance, "we have worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

3. There is a recognition of God's power and a confession of guilt, "When Simon Peter saw this he fell at Jesus' knees and said, 'Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!'"

One commentator says: "Throughout Scripture we see that human sin, failure and inadequacy are no obstacles to God's call. God calls imperfect people to Do God's work, people who are aware of their unworthiness and are often doubting and resistant to God's call."

4. There is a call and a response: "Then Jesus said to Simon, 'don't be afraid; from now on you will catch people.' So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him."

Like Peter, James, John and the others, we are called to follow Jesus. We are called as individuals and we are called together.

Jesus calls us in our success to use our skills, our natural yet God-given abilities. Jesus also calls us in our failures, to use our weakness and our God-reliance. That day, Peter had been relatively unsuccessful. He was a professional fisherman and he'd caught nothing that night.

God has displayed his miraculous power amongst us. We have seen the transformative work of God in our own lives, in the lives of others, and in our neighbours throughout our city. We are called to respond.

The Catch

What we must remember is that this call to discipleship, this call to follow Jesus and to catch humans is not a deceitful, ill-meaning kind of catch. It's not a hook, line and sinker, kind of catch. The Greek word here means to catch alive.

Here Simon Peter and the others are given the opportunity for a new vocation, one which involves catching people that they might live.

We share that call. We are invited to contribute to the Kingdom of God, to help people find, follow and know Jesus.

Over the next 40 days and beyond, may we continue to discern our individual sense of call and may we discern together our sense of call as a church, as a parish that gathers in the inner city of Tauranga Moana – a peaceful harbour, a safe anchorage.

May we be honest and brave. May we 'persevere in the work that has so well begun', and may we embrace the unknown of a new vocation, knowing that God prepare and equips us for the work God calls us to.