

# Called to Be Fishers of Men

## Notes for a Sermon at St Pauls–13th July 2003

Read from *The Message*.

*Once when Jesus was standing on the shore of Lake Galilee, the crowd was pushing in on him to better hear the Word of God. He noticed two boats tied up. The fishermen had just left them and were out scrubbing their nets. He climbed into the boat that was Simon's and asked him to put out a little from the shore. Sitting there, using the boat for a pulpit, he taught the crowd.*

I notice two things about Jesus.

First, he took notice of his audience. Not in own rhetoric.

Worried about the press of people.

Second, he SITS to talk.

Palestinian tradition.

In Fiji...

Matthew video has Jesus walking around preaching to crowds. This appeals to our European culture, but it's technically incorrect.

Reason. Can't show off. Not a performance. Praying story.

This happened by Lake Galilee. Simon already knows Jesus. Mother-in-law. Fever.

That evening, probably the night before this, Jesus had been healing anyone and everyone. Demons left in droves screaming, "Son of God! You're the Son of God!"

In tradition, the place where archeologists think Simon Peter's mother-in-law lived is quite close to this place.

A ruin. A synagogue Luke 4:18. A house of Simon Peter's wife's mother. A high hill–sermon on the mount. By the Lake–smaller than Port Phillip.

Note: Simon and Peter are the same guy. Simon his real name. Peter his nickname. Rocky.

*When he finished teaching, he said to Simon, "Push out into deep water and let your nets out for a catch."*

*Simon said, "Master, we've been fishing hard all night and haven't even caught a sardine. But if you say so, I'll let out the nets."*

Peter's reaction -- interesting. Peter has no problem when Jesus is healing people, driving out demons, or preaching. He never criticises or comments. But as soon as Jesus suggests they go fishing, Peter objects. Why? Because Peter knows fishing.

It's easy to follow Jesus in the things we are ignorant about. If we are sick, we pray for healing because, unless we are a doctor or a nurse, we know nothing about healing. It's easy to pray for help when you're helpless.

If we are in a car accident. If a relationship is falling apart. If you're a teenage boy trying to work out the right way to approach the girl you want to be the love of your life. It's easy to pray.

But how often do we think we should pray for the things we are good at? We don't think this is God's business. The manager thinks he knows everything about management, why bother Jesus with this? The taxi driver knows about traffic, why bother Jesus with this? The fisherman knows when and where to fish and Peter knew that he knew more about fishing than this preacher-man. But maybe just to humour Jesus, Peter goes along with the request.

*It was no sooner said than done—a huge haul of fish, straining the nets beyond capacity. They waved to their partners in the other boat to come help them. They filled both boats, nearly swamping them with the catch.*

*Simon, when he saw it, fell to his knees before Jesus. “Master, leave. I’m a sinner and can’t handle this holiness. Leave me to myself.” When he pulled in that catch of fish, awe overwhelmed Simon and everyone with him. It was the same with James and John, Zebedee’s sons, coworkers with Simon.*

*Jesus said to Simon, “There is nothing to fear. From now on you’ll be fishing for men and women.” They pulled their boats up on the beach, left them, nets and all, and followed Jesus.*

I mentioned before that Simon already knew Jesus. He had already seen Jesus do amazing things. Healed his mother-in-law. Drove out demons. Preached in a way that kept the rapt attention of thousands of people. Yet it was only when Jesus went fishing, that this fisherman realised he was in the presence of someone extraordinary.

Haven't we all felt this way? Jesus knows about the spiritual things, the Kingdom of heaven, prayer, the occasional miracle—but when it comes to practical affairs, running our businesses or our homes, that's where WE are the experts. Jesus could not have had a better way to get Peter's attention. He entered Peter's world and showed him how he could change that world.

There was an article in a recent TIME magazine about the growth in Evangelical missionaries to Islamic countries in recent times. Many of these missionaries seem to think that the most important thing is preaching. Yet, Jesus shows us here that if we really want to communicate the power of God, we must enter into the practical, down-to-earth, everyday reality of people's lives. Peter had seen miracles and he may have been intrigued, but when Jesus entered his fisherman's world and demonstrated the power of God, Peter immediately dropped everything and took after Jesus.

There is a place for preaching, for sure. Otherwise I wouldn't be up here today. But I don't think anyone will be changed much by my sermons. Real change comes when Jesus enters our everyday lives. Real evangelism happens when missionaries go to the people, live with them, share in their ups and downs, and allow themselves to be the vehicle for the power of God in their lives. As St Francis of Assisi said, “Preach the Gospel. Use words if necessary.”

A friend of mine is an MK. His Dad and Mum were missionaries in Indonesia. They lived up in the mountains sharing in the people's lives, learning to farm and live like the locals. After a few years, enough people were intrigued by these foreigners who had come to be with them

and knowing by now that they were Christians, the locals asked the missionaries to teach them about their faith. The Missionary said, “Sure. Let’s meet in the village square every Thursday at 4 PM for one hour and I shall tell you about the Lord Jesus that I follow.”

The local people laughed at this. “You can’t have an open-air meeting at 4PM in the afternoon. It rains here every day at 4PM.”

“Let’s try it for 3 months,” the Missionary said. The people reacted like Simon Peter. They went along with the Missionary out of respect, but not really believing they could have an open-air meeting at 4PM.

The next Thursday, the Missionary arrived at 4PM for the meeting and so did the villagers. They met for an hour. He talked about Jesus. It did not rain. Every Thursday for the next 3 months, at 4PM the rain would clear, or it would hold off until 5PM. It never rained during the entire 12 week course.

My friend says that he is sure that the people remembered little of the actual words that were said during those 12 hours, but he saw that they were mightily impressed that this man, Jesus, of whom the Missionary spoke, could control the weather.

Did Peter follow Jesus just because he did this miracle? I don’t think so. As I said, Peter already knew and had heard Jesus. He didn’t block his ears when Jesus was in his boat, nor when he was sitting in his house talking, eating and being nice to everyone. The miracle got Peter’s attention. It confirmed what he probably already realised. That this Jesus was someone unbelievably special. Someone worth following. Someone worth leaving boat, nets, wife, children, for. As far as we know, not one of the people who followed Jesus like this, ever went back.

When the love of Jesus is combined with the power of the Holy Spirit, we are struck that this man, Jesus, is much more than a fine preacher, much more than a compassionate healer, and much more than a mere magician. The love of God for his creation is expressed by word, deed and signs. It is this combination of what we hear, see and experience that convinces us of the claims of the Kingdom.

Finally, an important footnote. We need to remind ourselves that we speak English and Jesus did not. He spoke Aramaic a language which is only spoken by a few people these days. There are Assyrian communities in Turkey, Iraq and other places who have kept alive the language that Jesus spoke. The New Testament was not written in Aramaic, however, but in Greek. And sometimes when it is translated into English we lose some meaning, or gain some meaning.

I used to read this story as a play on words. Jesus does a miracle of fishing, then he makes a play on words about fishing for men and women. Furthermore, since the only fishing I have ever done is with a fishing rod, I have all these images of bait and hooks, and casting, and reeling in, and putting a net under the fish.

This works for me because my mother tongue is English and in English we have a verb to

describe the action of catching fish. We call that *to fish*. And we call the man who fishes, a fisherman. Or, when the King James version of the Bible was translated, we called them the more gender-acceptable word, *fishers*. Jesus says, according to the KJV, “I shall make you fishers of men.” It would sound like nonsense to many non-English speakers, but we say that A fisher fishes for fish. And it makes perfect sense to us.

Unfortunately, this is not what the Bible says in Greek. Nor what Jesus would have said in Aramaic. In the first place, he tells Peter simple to let down his nets. They weren’t using bait or rods or hooks. And they weren’t *fishing* – in their language they were letting down their nets.

Later when Jesus says, “From now on you will fish for men and women” he is NOT using a direct equivalent of our verb to fish. Instead he is using a verb that is more like “catch alive.” It’s the word you would use if you wanted to catch an animal alive in a trap.

So there is no play on words here. And be careful about pushing the FISH metaphor in a way that Jesus never intended.

Remember Frank Buck. Movies or Comics of “Bring Em Back Alive.”

Jesus wants us to go out and bring them back alive. It’s not about using bait, and it’s not about hooking people or capturing them in a net. It’s about preserving their lives and bringing them into the Kingdom, full of life, full of possibility, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, full of the power that will turn that life into one of abundance and achievement.

Jesus tells Simon, James and John, that they will go out into the world, enter into the lives of people and reveal God’s love and power to people. People will come willingly into the kingdom. They will be taken alive for Jesus. Not caught in a trap, but turned towards the Kingdom in the full flow of life, with all their talents, energies and intelligence intact.

The call to all disciples down through the ages is go out into the everyday life of people, as Jesus came into the everyday life of Peter, and to let Jesus reveal his power and do his work of bringing people into the new and abundant life of the Kingdom of God.

And when Jesus does this, people will drop everything and follow him.

A-men.