

## Fishing Lessons!

There's no question that fishing makes for life-long memories. Whether it's your mate's tall tale that you never quite believed, or the day when your child caught their first fish, this sport brings people together and puts a smile on millions of faces. That's the special thing about fishing. And those who do it for a living have their own amazing stories too.

But today's Gospel reading is in a class of its own. Truly an amazing experience for professional fisherman, Simon Peter, and a day he would never ever forget.

The scene by the lakeside is clearly and skilfully described by Luke in the first three verse of chapter 5. (READ)

You can almost picture it in your mind's eye. This is almost certainly early morning. An eager crowd has gathered together to listen to Jesus. And he uses for his pulpit Simon Peter's fishing boat, as it had been anchored close to shore. After each fishing trip the equipment had to be checked and the nets cleaned and repaired in readiness for the next trip. And Jesus 'sat down', taking the customary position for teaching and he taught the people from the boat.

With the sermon over, Jesus gave instructions to Peter, 'Put out into deep water and let down the nets for a catch'. His purpose in part was to test Peter's obedience. Would he do as Jesus asked, even in areas of Peter's own expertise? And as always Jesus was looking to strengthen Peter's faith. What follows was a never-to-be-forgotten experience as far as Peter was concerned. For him it was a day when he made three of the greatest discoveries of his life.

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First he made a discovery about Christ and his power. That day he saw Jesus Christ in a new light and began to glimpse something of his divine glory. Let's hear how Luke describes it in verses 4-7. (READ)

So when Jesus gave his command, 'Put out into deep water...', Peter was plainly sceptical. As an experienced fisherman he knew well enough that the night was the most likely time for catching fish and also that the shallow waters were the best place to cast the net. Maybe he even thought, 'What would a carpenter know about fishing?'

And yet Peter knows enough about Jesus to respect his request. He had just seen the crowds listening to Jesus' insightful and authoritative teaching, he'd heard about his power and authority over evil spirits in the local synagogue and he'd even had Jesus visit his home and heal his sick mother-in-law. So he didn't waste time arguing. Instead he acted on Jesus' suggestion for he realised Jesus' word on any subject should not be ignored. He addressed Jesus now as 'Master', like our 'Sir'. It indicates someone in authority. And Peter's simple obedience brought amazing results. There were so many fish that his nets were at breaking point and others had to be called in to help. But even then they did not have enough capacity. The number of fish are not given, but clearly the size of the catch is abnormal. It could not be explained along the usual lines of fishing technique.

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This was not the first time Peter had witnessed Jesus' supernatural power. But this time it was different, because this deed made a deeper impression on him than anything he had previously seen. This was because the earlier experiences were what he had heard about or even noticed in the lives of those around him. This time it impacted him personally and directly. It was connected to his own life as a fisherman, his own trade, his own boat. Before this he'd realised that Jesus was different, but now he was coming to see Jesus was more than that, that he was divine.

It isn't just Peter long ago who experienced the impact Jesus can make on a person's life. There are many, even in church today, who have not had that experience. They are impressed with how Jesus conducted himself whilst on earth and admire his teaching. But they have not had a personal encounter with the living Christ, as did Peter. Peter was moving from belief about Jesus to belief in Jesus, from a head knowledge to a heart encounter. For Peter there were more discoveries to come, but at this stage we notice Jesus desiring to impact every area of his life as he does for us also. Peter knew fishing and he knew what this haul implied. Peter discovered firstly then about Jesus Christ and his power.

Secondly, Peter made a discovery about himself in verses 8-10A. (READ) One discovery led to another. Peter's vision of Jesus also gave him a vision of himself, such as he had never seen before. As he bowed at Jesus' feet, he cried out, 'Go away from me Lord; I am a sinful man'.

These words remind us of the experience of 'great ones' in the immediate presence of God. We read of Isaiah's experience in today's Old Testament reading - Isaiah chapter 6. The prophet was granted this vision of God's majesty and glory and holiness. The Lord was high and exalted

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above manipulation. He was seated on his judgement throne. The time of reckoning had come. And Isaiah's response was not one of rapture and pleasure, but one of sheer terror. (Isaiah 6:5), 'Woe is 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.' He was unfit to be in the Lord's presence. He was unclean in comparison to God's pure holiness. It is this sheer holiness of God which reveals to us our true condition, not a comparison to others. And this is exactly how it was for Peter in his fishing boat. He recognised the hand of God himself and that drove him to realise his own sinfulness.

Probably up to this time Peter had thought himself as quite good when compared to others, certainly no great sinner. If so, he was suddenly and rudely compelled to revise his opinion. His self esteem received a severe shock. In the presence of Jesus he saw himself as he really was in God's sight and all the pride was knocked out of him.

'Lord, I am a sinful man', he confessed. He was right. And that was a necessary discovery if Peter was ever to become anything as a Christian. But, 'Go away from me, Lord.' That was not right, or Peter could never become a Christian at all.

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It is at this point, the awareness of our sinfulness, that the promises of God's Word meet us in our great need. These are truly words of assurance. 1 Timothy 1:15, 'Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.' 1 John 2:1,2, 'If any one sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, and he is the perfect offering for our sins.'

Here then was Peter's second discovery - it was about himself and his sinfulness.

Peter's third and final discovery that day was about life and its purpose in verses 10B-11. (READ)

As the Lord lifted Peter to his feet and looked into his eyes he said to him, 'Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men.' Here is the sequel to the miracle. The words of reassurance, 'Don't be afraid', mean 'Stop being fearful' rather than 'Don't get scared'. It calms Peter's existing fear. He goes from being awestruck to seeing things in a new way. A turning point has been reached. From now on things will be different with Peter. Jesus is calling him to a new life of 'catching men'.

Here is the new plan for Peter's life. The fisherman who had spent all his days among boats and nets, and assumed that this was how he would spend the rest of his days now heard that God had something bigger and better in store for him. 'From now on you will catch men'. This was to be a continuous action - this was to be his ongoing practice. And the 'catching' was different too. Whereas as a fisherman he had caught for death, from now on, his catching would be for life.

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But as a fisherman the principles of his trade had their relevance to his new role. He had learned that to catch fish you had to go to where the fish were. You had to use different methods (and baits) to catch different fish. And if fishermen worked together they would catch more fish.

As we seek as a church to reach more people with the message of Christ's love and forgiveness then we will go about it in different ways in different places. People in their spiritual need will be the same, but the best way to engage with them will vary.

For all fishermen, indeed for all Christians who fish for Jesus, fishing with nets takes faith, demands perseverance and depends on the mercy and grace of God.

'Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.'  
(Hebrews 12:1)

'Jesus calls us o'er the tumult of our life's wild restless sea; day by day his voice is sounding, saying, 'Christian, follow me.' (Cecil Frances Alexander).