

Sermon for Sunday 12th July 2020

The Messiah's Team

Text: Luke 5: 1-11 – Jesus calls the first Disciples

Introduction

There is only so much one man can do! When you are on to something really good, it makes sense to find ways to multiply the good by getting others to spread the good news!

For example, the McDonalds hamburger story is about a great restaurant in Southern California that became a world-wide sensation. It was owned by two brothers who made great hamburgers in quick time; fast food par excellence! But it was a salesman called Ray Kroc who saw the potential to replicate this all over the world and started the franchising of McDonalds Restaurants. Today there are 37,855 McDonalds in the world!

So it is here with Jesus, only more so. From a tiny cohort of faithful followers at the cross, 1 disciple and a few women, there are 2 billion, 263 million Christians in the world today! There is a prophetic element in the passage today that has absolutely come true, been fulfilled in subsequent centuries. The large and unexpected catch of fish is an accurate prediction of the large and unexpected growth of Christianity as it spread out through the Roman Empire and down through the centuries to where we are today with 31% of the world's population Christian.

The lead in to the bible reading today sees Jesus performing miracles and teaching with great authority and impact. Having been thrown out of the Synagogue in Nazareth, he had taken to the roads, fields and lakesides of Galilee with his message and ministry and thousands were flocking to get some of him! By the time we get to this particular incident we read that people were 'pushing' their way up to him to hear the word of God!

Jesus needs to retreat to the bow of a fishing boat in order to find a safe, visible place to preach (incidentally, the modern pulpit takes its shape from the bow of a boat *and* the nave at Cashmere Presbyterian is in the shape of a boat even to the point of the wood going both ways). **But** there has been many a popular movement that dies out once its charismatic leader dies. The key to exponential growth, Jesus knew, was to train up a committed group who would move out and replicate his message and ministry when he was gone! Hence, from the multitudes he calls his 12 disciples. In Luke's gospel this takes place firstly here with the 3 fishermen, Simon, James and John, then with the calling of Levi the tax collector in v27-31, and finally with the establishment of the chosen 12 disciples in 6:12-16.

Qualifications for a Discipleship

To get a McDonalds franchise there will be criteria to be met, the most important being, can you afford it!

In Jesus' day, Rabbis (teachers) regularly gathered disciples (pupils), so this was not an unusual thing Jesus was doing. There are a number of differences in the way this happens with Jesus, though. The most stunning difference is the kind of people he chose to be his disciples! They were ordinary, sinful people! Not budding theologians, not upright pillars of the Synagogues, but fishermen and even dastardly tax collectors like Levi! Peter knew himself how wrong this felt in the society of the day when he protested "Go away from me, Lord! I am a sinful man."

Why this contrast between established rabbi/discipleship practice and Jesus? Jesus was looking for people who knew their need for God and were therefore open to forgiveness, healing and

transformation! He actually had no time for the self-righteous and hard of heart. In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector (Luke 18:9-14) we see Jesus spell this out. It is not the self-righteous judgmental prayer of the Pharisee that is commended by Jesus, but the humble confession of the tax collector.

It is a humble acknowledgement of our need for God that opens us up to a relationship with God that has the power to transform us and empower us as followers of Christ!

Am I qualified to be a disciple?

Can I see myself in those early disciples? I think the resounding answer should be yes if we see ourselves as ordinary folk, from a variety of backgrounds, who know we are not perfect and have need for God in our lives! This is a key message of this passage. Specifically, can we see ourselves in Simon (to later be known as Peter), the key character in this story? Let's have a look at the progressive steps in his move into discipleship and see if we can put ourselves in his shoes....

1. The encounter with God through Christ

There are two stages in this encounter for Peter.

Firstly, when he is asked to go out fishing again! At face value this is a carpenter telling a fisherman what to do! In fact, a fisherman who was tired after a luckless night of fishing!

In Zefferelli's movie Jesus of Nazareth, Peter has his head down attending to his boat when Jesus asks him to go out again. His first response is an angry "no; you don't know what you are talking about". It is when he lifts his head and looks into the penetrating eyes of Jesus that he changes. I can imagine something like this – the irresistible authority in the eyes of Jesus that Peter encounters compels him to take the boats out again!

The second point of encounter with Jesus is when the huge, miraculous catch takes place. At this point what Peter sensed in the eyes of Jesus is confirmed and he falls on his knees and confesses his sinfulness!

I believe that during our lives we all have God moments, times of encounter with God. I remember years ago reading the book written by one of Richard Nixon's henchmen, Charles Colson. It was called Born Again. He talks about the soul searching he did after being arrested for his part in the Watergate scandal. He was in a boat on his own, on a lake under stars one night, when he encountered God in a powerful way that changed his life. He ponders in his book about whether we all at some time have these kind of moments? I think we do! The key question then is how do we respond? How did Peter respond?

2. Acknowledgement of our failing.

In the face of a holy, powerful and miracle working God, Peter knew he was a puny, sinful man! **And** even though he told Jesus to go away, in his acknowledgement of his sinfulness he was also acknowledging his need for God - for God's unconditional love, forgiveness and healing!

Alcoholics Anonymous know from bitter experience the power of this in their 12 step programme. The first step to recovery is to admit to the problem!

3. Know God's call on our lives!

That will be different and unique for every person. Here Peter was called away from his fishing nets to become a full-time Christian worker! I know that kind of journey as I was called away from my job as a solicitor into Presbyterian ministry. But I also know many Christian lawyers who have been called to work out their discipleship in their legal practice, absolutely!

The generic message, though, is that working out our discipleship wherever God has placed us is a high calling that should take priority in our lives as it did for Peter! The fact that he dropped all he was doing to follow Christ rams this message home, which leads on to the next point...

4. Follow the call

Peter responds to the call of Jesus twice here. Firstly, to the demanding request to a tired fisherman to go out fishing again. Secondly, to a call to 'cast his nets in a different sea, the sea of humanity's need for God' (Bock, Luke)

How are you responding to God's call on your life right now? Because God calls us all in our particular gifts, passions, jobs, stages of life. The calling changes over the years, but it never dissipates. And in a church like Cashmere there is a huge array of Christian service going on, in our families, neighbourhood, community groups, interest groups, workplaces, retirement villages. If we were to collect up stories of what everyone was doing it would fill a fishing net to overflowing, I am sure!

And, finally..

5. Be transformed

The ongoing story of Peter in scripture is steady and sure transformation of a sinful, impetuous man who often got things wrong, into the rock upon which the Christian church was built! How did that happen?

In part it was his willingness to follow the right leader.

There was an article in The Press this week about the decision of the NZ cricket coach, Mike Hesson, to replace Ross Taylor with Brendan McCullum as the captain of the Black Caps. Taylor was, and is, a lovely man and an outstanding cricketer, but under his leadership the team was languishing at the bottom of world cricket rankings in all forms of the game. Hesson saw in McCullum leadership qualities that could transform the team ... and they did. Under his leadership NZ cricket had one of its best ever periods of success!

I reckon we too need a leader who can transform our lives from ordinary into all that God has for us! That leader is Rabbi Jesus. May we choose, like Peter, to follow in humble discipleship and see our lives and the world around us transformed as a result!