

Repent and become fishers of people: Mark 1:14-20

I remember as a small child going to children's church and singing, "I will make you fishers of men". Of course, I was not aware of the lack of inclusivity in that song, and it would be challenging to try and change the words, so it isn't on any of my hymn lists today. On reflection I probably didn't understand what it really meant, but it had a catchy tune, and I was always delighted when we sang it. Somewhere deep within, that call, stayed waiting for the moment when I would understand a little better what it meant: when I was willing to submit myself to what I was then to tell others about. We cannot take people to places we have not been willing to risk and walk ourselves.

Today's reading is about the calling of the disciples at the sea of Galilee. Men who were fishermen. Hardy individuals able to read the weather but probably not much else. Frowned upon by city folk for their country ways. Strong men fighting the currents, the weather, the boat and the heavy fishing nets on a good day. It is quite extraordinary that it was these men that Jesus invited to join him in fishing for people. What was it that Jesus saw in them? Well may be that they were very ordinary folk trying to make a living. Just that. They had to be people of patience as fishermen, waiting for the right time to fish, waiting to find the fish and fill their nets. I guess they also knew disappointment. They no doubt worked as teams so they knew what it was like to support one another in their work and in the community. They understood about casting nets wide and far. They knew what it was like to risk their lives. As ordinary folk from Galilee they may have been deeply religious but were not caught up in the Temple rules which would have dominated the city folk of Jerusalem. When they saw Jesus, when they heard Jesus talk about the Kingdom of God being

near, they might even have been surprised expecting something like that to be heard and seen in Jerusalem first. Imagine their amazement and even the wonder in discovering that they had been chosen and trusted to play a part in whatever this new Kingdom of God was about. It was enough for them to lay down their nets, give up their boats, and let go of all that they knew, to risk everything they knew, to follow the man who had invited them, who wanted to share whatever this journey was to be, with them.

The time has come: Jesus said.

The Kingdom of God has come near: Jesus said.

Repent and believe the good news: Jesus said.

According to Mark there are two elements to the good news – there is the general and then there is the particular.

The general is that the Kingdom of God has come near. The particular is that specific invitation to the disciples to follow Jesus and tell others that it is near. The invitation is to join in. The invitation is to repent and believe the good news of the one who has issued the invitation.

Repent and become fishers of people Jesus said.

That sounds fairly easy, doesn't it? Quite straight forward wouldn't you say?

Perhaps the first question to ask is do we understand enough ourselves about what Jesus is talking about?

Let's just think about this for a minute. Do we believe that Jesus is good news? If he is good news do we believe that he is good news for everyone no matter who they are? If he is good news how has that changed who you are, or how does that have potential to change you? You see that is the repentance part of this. I think that there are two parts to repentance. The first part is that we repent of our unfaithfulness to God, in that as part of the human race we have turned away from him and gone our own way.

Repenting of that means we are turning back to God and our desire is to accept Jesus into our lives, and through the Cross, he has and will put us right before God, and we will spend the rest of time trusting in God for everything in our lives. The problem is we often fail in that, so we also repent of those times when we have put God on the side-lines of our life and so as we lament of our sin but also are aware of his forgiveness, which we have already experienced in that turning back to God, so that we are once again in receipt of all that Jesus has won on the Cross for us. In the C of E it is built into our liturgy but it must not just be words but a willingness to refocus our lives on God. Repent and become fishers of people: Jesus said. So we have two parts to repentance and we are then Kingdom people who have good news to tell others. If you are a disciple of Jesus, and I will assume that everyone here is, then Jesus has given us a job to do. He didn't say only certain people are to do this, he didn't say you have to wait to be trained, he didn't say you have to know everything there is to know about God. He didn't say that. He offers an invitation: Come and follow me and I will send you out to fish for people.

So, let's think a minute about fishing. We live on the coast so it should be fairly easy for us to conjure up a picture of people fishing. There is more than one type: beach fishing and fishing from a boat. There is rod and line fishing and then there is net fishing. Now my dad enjoyed fishing, and he often fished from the shore. As a girl I wasn't really encouraged to join in, but it always fascinated me. I saw that you had to have a lot of patience for a start. I used to pester my dad to have a go, but he put a stipulation down. If I was going to fish, I had to learn to put the worms on the hooks. I could not do that. There was something about worms that I disliked and although I could dig them up when we went to find them for bait, I could never pick them up. So, there was my

stumbling block to wanting to fish. I wonder what the stumbling blocks might be for us to go fishing for people to invite them to follow Jesus.

Even if we get ourselves to the beach or the river bank the thing is that we are not to be Sunday anglers sitting there just waiting for a bite. As lovely as that might sound for some who would enjoy the tranquillity which can come with that, I think that this has always had a sense of urgency to it, and today it is very urgent. I wonder whether we have caught the urgency of this call.

God can work in people's lives despite us, but he has called his disciples, you, if you count yourself as a disciple, and me, to work with him and to tell people about the good news of Jesus Christ. As things stand at the moment, it wouldn't surprise me that history will record that we are the generation who allowed the fish to get away. But like climate change it is still possible to do something about it.

So here are some ideas:

As in Thy Kingdom come, are you praying for your five people – family and friends to come to know Jesus? Start again if you have stopped. Be patient but keep praying.

Do people know you are a Christian, a disciple of Jesus? Do you ever tell people? If not, think whether you can do so.

Think about your own story of your journey of faith and be ready and willing to share it with someone.

Invite someone to church. Christmas is a good time for that. We have the Christmas Tree Festival – bring someone to see it and that gives you an opportunity to talk about your spiritual home.

It's a challenge, it can be risky, but is it not worth it to see someone else come to faith in Jesus and for them to know all that Jesus offers us. Let's dare to put a sign on the door: Gone fishing!