

FOLLOW ME LUKE 5:1-11

Have you ever had a life-changing moment? One of these moments in life when you know that life will never be same again afterwards. These kinds of moments come in all shapes and sizes. There are some large national events that change people lives: for an older generation it would be knowing where you were when President Kennedy was shot; more recently in the UK it would be 10 years ago remembering the aftermath of the death of Diana. These are events that changed nations forever and the legacy of both events still touches the US and the UK. There are smaller, more personal events that change us forever: it might be the obvious thing like meeting the person who would become the love of your life and 'love at 1st sight' does work still; or an illness that changes life forever. It might seem a small, insignificant event at the time, but looking back you see that such a small event led to other things that changed your life.

Encountering Jesus is probably the most profound of these life-changing 'moments'. We come 'face-to-face' with Jesus and life is never quite the same again. I say 'moments' but it can take more than a moment. We make a decision, for example, to begin to read the bible for the first time as an adult; a little decision, perhaps, but in doing that we encounter the person of Jesus and over a period of time, we come to faith in Jesus. Or you make the decision to come to Church, or come back to Church after a long time away and again through the preaching and the experience of worship we encounter Jesus as a living Saviour and we come to faith and life is never the same again. We face new challenges, we live life in a new way, life has new qualities, God gives us new gifts. Life is never quite the same again in the best possible way.

We are going to look at 2 episodes from Luke in which life is never same again for 2 men who would become friends, followers and disciples of Jesus. We read the story of Peter's experience, but we will also look briefly at the story of Levi (or Matthew) that would come later. Last week, we sat in the synagogue in Nazareth, listening to Jesus preach His first sermon and set out His priorities for ministry, "*preaching good news...*" and we saw how well people reacted to Him till He began to show them that God's grace was for everyone, not just the Jews. They then thought that God was rescuing the wrong people and they wanted to throw Jesus off the cliff. There are some printed copies of last Sunday's sermon in the vestibule; you can also find it on the website. Today we see how the people Jesus chose to be His friends and followers might also make people think He'd chosen the wrong people.

Today, we're standing beside Sea of Galilee; Luke calls it 'Lake Gennesaret' but it is the same place. It is maybe lunchtime or the afternoon, in the heat of day anyway; Jesus has a crowd of people round Him as He invariably did by this time, and they were listening to Him teach, but crowd was pressing Him too close to shore. "*He saw...*" (Luke 5:2f) "Can I borrow your boat?" This is the first link in a chain of events that would change the life of the boat-owner for ever. It was Peter's boat! After He had finished, He then told the fisherman

how to fish! I wonder whether there is a Jewish saying equivalent to our one about grandmothers and sucking eggs; if there was Peter might have quoted it! Was there a look on his face? It was broad daylight and they were out in the middle of the lake; you don't catch fish in broad daylight and not out there; you catch them in the dark and towards shore, "*Master...*" (5:5f) 'Will you go out to catch fish?' The decision to listen to Jesus was the next small step in this life-changing moment!

There were two kinds of reaction: 1)astonishment – they've never had a catch of fish like this ever; it was so large that the nets began to break; they needed help from their partners' boat! This is a reaction that would be repeated over and over again in the ministry of Jesus as people witnessed Him do some extraordinary things. 2)unworthiness "*Go away...*" (5:8) This was one prayer that Jesus doesn't grant; Peter has seen something of the glory of God breaking through into his life by this wonder though he might not have understood it in that way; he has seen something of the greatness of Jesus and he sees how small and unworthy and weak and faltering he is! Peter knows that he has failed, that he is a 'sinner', that he has his faults and shortcomings, that he needs grace and forgiveness from God. He is not a bad man, not a wicked man, but not all that he might be, yet.

So Jesus says to Peter "*Don't be...*" (5:10f) 'from now on' – "introduces a new set of circumstances. A turning point has been reached. From now on things will be different with Peter." (Morris) The last step in this life-changing moment is Peter's decision to say 'yes' to Jesus. 'Catching men' is all about process we described earlier, sharing with other people the good news about Jesus, the good news that Jesus came to preach, so that others would understand and come to faith. Peter would spend the rest of his life in this grand enterprise; other than one recorded instance after Easter, Peter never seemed to go fishing again.

Levi (Matthew) is sitting in his tax-booth beside the road; we talked about him a few weeks ago and Jesus came along and said to him "*follow...*" and he did! He gave up being a tax-collector, a customs and excise man, and became a follower, a disciple, of Jesus. Later that day, he introduced Jesus to his friends at dinner, the first example in Luke of someone being a 'fisher of men' perhaps, allowing his friends to meet Jesus for themselves, for the first time. Some complained about the people with whom Jesus was eating, he was with the wrong kind of people again. So Jesus said "*It is...*" (5:31)

These were life-changing moments for 2 men; they would never be same again; for them it would mean leaving their work behind and taking on a new job; it would mean making new friends with other disciples, maybe people they knew well already, but maybe some people they had never met before; it would mean travel, going to the places Jesus visited and going with Him, watching, listening; then later taking on new responsibility as leaders of the Church. Life-changing? Both men had a quality of life they would never have had if they had rejected Jesus. There would be hard at times, but they would come to see a whole new quality of life, peace, hope, forgiveness, love that only Jesus could offer.

'Life-changing' can be a scary phrase. We don't like change! We're comfortable as we are; we don't want to change. "When Christ calls a person, he bids them come and die" (Bonhoeffer) Dietrich Bonhoeffer was German Christian and pastor in early part of C20th who became involved anti-Nazi resistance towards end of World War 2. For his part in this he was put to death by the Nazis; he did die for being disciple of Jesus. But that was not what he meant! He meant that all the things we think of as important, all the status symbols we enjoy, the things that give us significance in life, such as a good job, wealth, the expensive car etc, all count for nothing compared to much, much, much better life following Jesus. "*I consider...*" (Phil 3:8)

It is fascinating to see the people Jesus calls. Peter was a fisherman; Levi was a tax-collector. Can we use the word 'ordinary' without seeming to do people down? I hope so, because that's what these men were. These are not the religious elite of their day; there are no 'important men' here; these are ordinary people like you and me and Jesus calls them to be His friends, followers and disciples, to be the people who will tell others about Him. Sometimes we have the idea that you need to be some kind of special person to be a Christian, that only some kind of specially 'religious' people are eligible, or that we need to be able to understand everything the bible teaches with a theology degree. Some have the notion that you need to be perfect to call yourself a Christian, 'I'm not good enough!' is something that many people say; 'I don't qualify!' Peter's first response was to feel his unworthiness, but Jesus didn't go away; Jesus didn't abandon Peter because of his faults; Jesus took Peter as he was, warts and all and said "Follow me!"

We are called to be disciples. That's different from being spectators, pew-fillers, even from being 'church members' with names on a list. The basic idea of a Christian in the gospels is that we become disciples of Jesus. There are several parts to being a disciple:

- Our allegiance is to Jesus, It is a personal allegiance to the person of Jesus who is our Saviour and Lord; this allegiance is based on a relationship of faith and trust. "Discipleship means knowing Him, loving Him, believing in Him, being committed to Him." (Watson)
- Our allegiance is a shared allegiance. Peter, Andrew, James, John, Levi – 12 of them altogether, followed Jesus together and learned from one another as well as from Jesus. That's why it is so important for us to be part of Church, because it allows us to encourage one another and support one another in the life of faith, as disciples of Jesus.
- Our allegiance to Jesus leads us to serve Jesus and serve other people. "*they pulled...*" (5:11) We will not all be called to leave the job we're doing, the place we live in, our family and friends, but where we are at work, in our family, with our friends, in this community, we are all called to serve Jesus as His disciples.

Discipleship is about learning and growing that allegiance. The word means 'pupil' and learning and so brings with it the notion that we're not ever perfect. We have lots to learn. When I finished my training for ministry there was a sense in the Church that I'd done it all; I had all that I needed to be a minister.

It is different now; there is now a whole scheme of In-service training and on-going development through study leave because now the church knows that ministers are never finished learning. If that is true of me and my ministry, it is true of all of us as Christians. Who of us perfectly understands God, or Jesus, or the bible? Who of us always gets it right every time we speak or act? None of us! The more we learn, the more we know we don't know! Being a disciple is about our allegiance to Jesus growing, deepening, strengthening as we read the Bible, as we come to worship together and as we serve Jesus and others.

Life-changing moments? Some are huge and instant! Some are a chain of small, seemingly insignificant choices. Yet, they change our life forever. "Can I use your boat, Peter? Will you drop your nets here, Peter? Will you follow me, Peter?" Yes, yes, yes! Life would never be the same again. Will you come to Church today? Will you read Luke's gospel? Will you talk to your friend about it? These are small choices, but "Yes, yes, yes" might not only change our life for better, but someone else's life too!