

SERMON – 9/2/25
'Follow Me!'

Luke 5:1-11

“So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Him.” (Luke 5:11)

Our journey through this season of Epiphany has revealed Jesus to us from a number of different angles – the star that led the magi from the east, the miracle at the wedding in Cana, the hovering of the Holy Spirit like a dove at the Jordan, the preaching in the synagogue in Nazareth which simultaneously wowed the congregation and offended them. The ministry of Jesus is now well and truly underway and this morning we have read and listened for God's Word in the very familiar story of the call of the first disciples.

I wonder if you heard anything that surprised you in the reading this morning. Or I wonder if you missed something that you expected to hear. Remember there are four Gospels and the story is very slightly different in each one. For example, there is no mention at all of Andrew in Luke's account, while he appears alongside his brother Simon Peter in Matthew and Mark's version and is in many ways the major character in the story as it is told in John's Gospel.

As I have doubtless said before, I never cease to be amazed at what there is to discover in Bible stories that I think I know well, and it's really important to listen intently when the Gospel is read, and not to assume that you know what God's message to you will be after you've heard the first sentence. I have told many of you before that what I do at the very beginning of the week in preparing to preach is not just to read the passage I am preaching on but to copy it out by hand – it's amazing what you notice as you write that you might otherwise have missed.

What struck me very forcibly this week was the number of references in these eleven verses to boats and to nets – the word boat appears six times and there are five references to nets – and the more I reflected on that the more it seemed to me that the boats and the nets mirror the journey that the fishermen go on

with Jesus that day and the more I wondered what kind of a journey Jesus might be inviting you and me to join Him on today.

Follow the story through with me again, will you, and as I highlight the references to boats and to nets, ask yourself what the equivalent things might be for you in your context. For me as a minister perhaps my boat is the church and perhaps the nets I use are the tools of my trade – preaching and teaching and pastoral care. What is it that you use in your daily life, I wonder?

For the fishermen, it was the *end* of the working day – they had been out on the lake all night, we are told, working hard but catching nothing, and we can probably all relate to that.

Sometimes we feel as if we have put in a really hard shift and yet we have got nothing to show for it. They had got back to shore and had pulled their two boats up onto the beach, but even though there was no catch to sell they still had their nets to clean before they could go home and put their feet up. You know what it's like when you've had a tough day and yet there is still stuff to do before you can get finished and rest.

Enter Jesus. He too is working, if that's the best way to describe it. He is teaching God's Word and people are crowding round him by the lake-shore. Simon Peter is probably keen to get finished his toil so that he can go and listen to the Teacher too, so imagine his surprise when he sees Jesus climbing into *his* boat and asking if whoever it is it belongs to can push him out in it so that he can be heard by the growing crowd without getting crushed by them. Suddenly, the cleaning of the nets can wait – Jesus has given him fresh purpose and you can almost feel the excitement rising in him and the disappointment of their fruitless night on the lake slipping away.

Who knows how long Jesus spoke for. It might well have been some time. As He draws to a close, perhaps the Lord wants to give an example to the crowd of something he has been speaking about or perhaps he just wants to minister to Simon Peter in his disappointment. Whatever the reason, Jesus invites Simon to put the boat back to its intended purpose and to let the nets down again in deeper water for a catch. Now everyone knows you are even less likely to catch fish in daylight than in the dark but, despite the fact that there had been no fish to catch there in all

the previous hours and perhaps because he has seen Jesus do miraculous things (like healing people) when he has heard him teaching before, he agrees to let down the nets again, and he and his companions quickly see that there is such a large number of fish that the nets are in danger of breaking. He calls his partners to bring the other boat out too, but not only are the nets full to breaking point the two boats look like they are going to sink, and the gob-smacked fishermen are not only astonished at the unprecedented haul of fish they have just taken, they feel frightened in the presence of Jesus, conscious of their own unworthiness and wanting to flee from Him. The Lord quickly reassures them – 'Don't be afraid,' He says – and promises them that from now on they will fish for people. And the story finishes with that verse with which I began: "So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything (dirty nets and haul of fish included perhaps) and followed Him." There are the boats again after their game of hokey cokey – in, out, in, out – fruitless the previous night, repurposed as a pulpit for Jesus to speak from, put back to work again fishing and almost lost to the waves under the weight of a never-before-experienced haul, now abandoned in order that the fishermen whose lives had once revolved around them might take up a new calling. And there are the nets, empty the night before, wearily washed, let down again and stretched almost beyond their ability to endure, now left behind along (it would seem) with the huge catch of fish that would have netted them a good income but which didn't seem to matter any more. What a difference a few hours had made.

What do *you* hear in this story in your own context? What is God saying to you this morning? Well take a moment to consider what your boat might be and what your nets are. If you are working, what are the tools of your trade, and even if you are no longer employed what are the things that your life revolves around and that you use day after day? Perhaps you sense a weariness with the things that you have always done. Maybe you only ever did them just to make a living, or maybe you once really enjoyed what you did and found fulfilment in it but now you wonder why you bother.

Well let me suggest to you three different messages that might be taken from this morning's passage and let me invite you to consider not what *you* would like to be doing but what it is that *God* wants of you today.

Firstly, just as Jesus asked to repurpose Simon Peter's boat and use it to speak to the crowd from that day, could it be that Christ is asking to use whatever it is that you do day by day to fulfil a different purpose, to be a vehicle for the advancement of His Kingdom and for the sharing of His Word? What might God do with you and with your tools today? It might just be a temporary thing or an occasional thing, but ask God today how He might use you and use the gifts you have to enable others to draw close to Him.

Secondly, just as Jesus invited Simon Peter to return to the deep water and to let down his nets again even though he had been so spectacularly unsuccessful so recently, could it be this morning that Christ is inviting you to pick yourself up, to get back on your bike and do what you know deep down you were always meant to be doing, but to do it not in your own strength but with a dependency on God and with a fresh anointing of heavenly grace and power? If you have had a tough time of it recently, ask God to re-equip you and recommission you for the calling you perhaps felt was slipping away from you.

Or thirdly, just as Jesus called Simon Peter and his partners to leave their boats and their nets and to fish for people rather than for carp, could it be that Christ is asking someone here this morning to take a really big step of faith and take up a call to Christian ministry of some kind, whether as a missionary or a pioneer, whether in practical service or the ministry of Word and Sacrament? Maybe it's the first time you have ever even contemplated such a thing and you hear the voice of Jesus rather than my voice this morning, or maybe God has been knocking at your door for a while and you keep closing it on Him. Don't let the sun go down tonight without having a word with someone about it or at the very least asking God to clarify to you what is being asked of you.

It's entirely possible that God is saying different things to different people this morning. That shouldn't surprise us because

all of us are different and all of us are in different circumstances. To every single one of us here this morning Jesus is saying, 'Follow me!' And if you have never put your faith in Jesus before, today is the day. But it is for each one of us to listen for God and to test His call by prayerfully mulling over what we think we may be hearing and by talking with others whose wisdom and spiritual discernment have been proven. In our reading this morning, Simon Peter responded to Jesus' call to borrow his boat; he also responded to Jesus' call to let down his nets again for a catch, being willing to take a step of faith even though his human instincts were telling him it was a waste of time; and even when his whole being was consumed by a sense of his own unworthiness he responded to Jesus' call to leave His boat and his net behind him and take a whole new direction in life altogether. That was what Simon and his partners had to do and so they did it. "They pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Him."

The question is, what is God revealing to *you* today? Which direction is Jesus calling *you* to follow Him this week? And what are you going to do about it?