

## Luke 5:1-11

Anyone who attended the funeral service for Andrew Campbell on 22nd December last year could not fail to have been impressed by the tribute from Michael Harrington, the young fishing skipper from Castletownbere, Co. Cork in Ireland. Michael and his crew were having no fortune catching fish. There was no doubt that the fish were there but they weren't finding their way into Michael's nets. He described how Andrew and friends from Lossiemouth travelled to Cork to have a look at their set-up and routine to try and find a way to break the bad fortune. The old, wise heads made some suggestions and almost immediately the nets filled and the boxes overflowed with fish. I couldn't help bringing to mind the story of Jesus and his first disciples recorded in Luke 5 and the very similar story

recorded in John 22. Like Michael Harrington, the disciples were prepared to listen and everything changed as a result of that.

There's something very settling and comforting about standing by the seashore on a sandy beach - the east beach in Lossiemouth is a perfect example, and watching the tide ebb and flow, pulling and pushing the sand back and forth with the sound of the waves filling the air: perfect! It's that pulling and pushing that is characteristic of the story in Luke's Gospel as Jesus engaged with the fishermen. There is nothing that is forced or unnatural in their relating to one another instead we have a giving and receiving, a to-ing and fro-ing of the tide of life that we can relate to. And we mustn't miss that in the story because it's at the core of what the story teaches us. I can remember as a teenager being part of a church that did evangelism. It

was something that we were consciously involved in and for a shy individual like myself, it was terrible. Knocking doors and inviting strangers to a church event was difficult enough but to ask a stranger a question about his or her faith, or lack of it, was just too much, but we were expected to do it. It was all very unnatural and forced and completely at odds with the way Jesus, I believe, related to people. This story of the catching of the fish and Jesus' comment at the end of the story to the fishermen that from now on they will be catching people is easily mis-read. The sharing of the good news of Jesus Christ is not about ensnaring people as if they were fish caught in nets. That's not how Jesus lived and related to people.

Note that Jesus first of all asked for the use of a boat. It wasn't his boat. He couldn't just come and take it - he had to request to be pushed a little off-shore. It was

natural and Jesus was happy to place himself in the debt of the fishermen. He owed them something for their generosity. It is a remarkable feature of the Bible that God is continually willing to take risks for humanity.

It is said:

“There was a very cautious man  
Who never laughed or played;  
He never risked, he never tried,  
He never sang or prayed.  
And when he one day passed away  
His insurance was denied;  
For since he never really lived,  
They claimed he never died!”

Winners see risk as opportunity. They see the rewards of success in advance. They do not fear the penalties of failure. The winning individual knows that bad luck is

attracted by negative thinking and that an attitude of optimistic expectancy is the surest way to create an upward cycle and to attract the best of luck most of the time. Winners know that so-called luck is the intersection of preparation and opportunity. If an individual is not prepared, he or she simply does not see or take advantage of a situation. Opportunities are always around, but only those who are prepared utilise them effectively. Winners seem to be lucky because their positive self-expectancy enables them to better prepared for their opportunities.

When asked by a news reporter how she thought she would do in one of her early career swimming meets in the United States several years ago, 14-year-old Australian Shane Gould replied, "I have a feeling there will be a world record today." She went on to set two

world records in the one-hundred- and two-hundred-meter freestyle events.

When asked how she thought she would fare in the more testing, gruelling, four-hundred-meter event, Shane replied with a smile, "I get stronger every race, and besides ... my parents said they'd take me to Disneyland if I win, and we're leaving tomorrow!" She went to Disneyland with three world records. At 16 she held five world records and became one of the greatest swimmers of all time, winning three gold medals in the 1972 Olympics. She learned early about the power of self-expectancy.<sup>1</sup>

It is an inherent characteristic of all that we know about God that he takes risks. It's not that he is rash or careless or reckless in any sense but instead that is love

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<sup>1</sup> Waitley, Denis in *The Winner's Edge* (Berkley Books) quoted in *Bits & Pieces*, March 4, 1993, p. 13-15.

for us is so great that he will continually invest in us despite our dismal record. And of course because God takes risks, Jesus took risks. How did he know that when the fishermen were asked to go out again despite their better judgement, that the rewards would be so considerable - that these trusting men who had lent Jesus the boat would receive a reward so much greater than their initial act of kindness? Because Jesus understood that the pulling, pushing, calling nature of our engagement with one another involved investing in the unknown - of taking risks so that lives would be changed for the better.

Yesterday, a group of people met in St. John's Episcopal Church in Princes Street in Edinburgh to listen to their questions being answered. They met to discover that there were more questions than they had thought of, and that the answers to these questions were not as

straightforward as they might have hoped! They were all there taking risks. Who were they? Well, they were a group of very different people who were beginning the discernment of a call of God to service within the ministries of the Church of Scotland. All of these people could have stayed at home and continued doing what they always do. Instead they chose not merely to listen to their conscience but to get up and do something about it. The next Vocations Information Day is on Saturday 8 June in the Steeple Church, Dundee. Will you be there? Where will you be?

“Lord, you have come to the seashore,  
neither searching for the rich or the wise,  
desiring only that I should follow.”

Hearing the Word is not enough. Following the Word is the only way. Jesus is the Word.

This is the challenge of the Sundays after the Epiphany.

May we be willing to follow.

Amen.