

'Put Out into the Deep'

Sermon message by the Rev Derek Lightbourne February 10th 2019 St James' and All Saints'

Keynote Bible passage: Luke 5.1 – 11

We're very familiar with this morning's gospel story, usually entitled '*Jesus calling the first disciples.*' And we know that from Jesus' call to Peter, Andrew, James and John they did respond they 'leaving everything and following Jesus'. Tracking back, we might ask why indeed? What prompted their going? The implication is that if this Jesus could somehow produce a large catch of fish in the net, he must be worth following. But it wasn't without protest, Peter was suggesting to Jesus he knew better. Fishing at night was usually more rewarding than in the daytime. Yet there was something in Peter that prompted a qualification, as he concedes to Jesus, 'If you say so, I will let down the nets.' Then James and John in the other boat are called over to help pull in the catch of fish. And we know the rest of the story. What would prompt the fishermen to follow Jesus? Peter is even on the verge of backing off as he says to Jesus, 'Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man.' How could he be in the presence of one so holy?

This Sermon message is entitled '*Put out into the deep water*' as it seems to me the impact of the event depends on this command of Jesus – what it meant for the disciples-to-be, and what it might mean for us. 'Put out into the deep...' How willing are we to do that when challenges confront us? Or if we were to express it in contemporary idiom, it's a challenge to move beyond our '*comfort zone*'. How often in life have you reckoned on taking big steps, beyond which initially, humanly seem impossible?

My response is to bring to mind several:

- In my first voyage to the Southern Ocean in 2007 sailing into the 'Roaring 40's.' As the ship lurched from side to side going from north to south with the 8 metre east-west swells I wondered how far can it be safe.
- Another was on my 70th birthday and my brothers and their spouses visited and for a day trip we went over to the Wairarapa and up the Waiohine river road to where there's a long swing(ing) bridge way above the rocks and river below. Being the oldest, I had to be brave.... one of my brothers declined the challenge!
- Or when in South America going to the mighty Iguacu Falls in Argentina and taking the opportunity to go on the 'Aqua Nautica' launch ride up and into the torrent of descending water. (Fortunately, they gave out water-proof bags for our cameras).
- Or a helicopter ride alongside and above snow-capped mountains of Fiordland. Great opportunities – great challenges to one's comfort zone.
- What for you? I'm sure such sharing will bring to mind some challenges of the outdoors.

May I extend this metaphor to include '*faith challenges.*' For after all this is what it was for the fisherman disciples. Would their actions amount to the faith they had in Jesus and who he was? What about for us?

One more linking the outdoors: some years ago, I was involved in leading a Christian Adventure camp on Waiheke Island. Young people loved the outdoor experience – mostly, including being introduced to kayaking and sailing. For them it was a challenge. And in the teaching and sharing time we likened their accepting the challenges, to the accepting of committing and following Jesus. Some years later, some have become leaders in the church – bishops and the present archbishop. And they attributed the adventure camps being a significant step in their faith-growth.

The 'Heritage Expedition' company has a saying which has faith step implications: 'One does not discover new lands without consenting to leave sight of the shore.' For us this suggests in taking faith-steps one has to let go – just like the words of the hymn:

'God gives us a future, daring us to go into dreams and dangers on a path unknown..... And then there's the hope of the one who walks beside and with us like that poem 'Footsteps': The hymn continues: 'We will face tomorrow in the Spirit's power, we will let God change us for new life starts now.' As one thinks about it that's how it was for those first disciples, and the others over the year who have joined them.

So, how do we get to be like Peter who responds to taking the faith step,' Lord, if you say so, I will let down the nets.' Remember, at this time they were on the beach washing their nets, and then launching the boats and rowing out to the deep water of the lake. The 'key' was to keep close to Jesus, and trust, 'if you say so, I will...'

In introducing the theme, the outdoors is certainly a place where challenges present. And there's others too. I've thought of four further aspects. Think of *health challenges*. As we get older, they seem more, and can be difficult to surmount. Thankfully modern medicine and medical technology may help. I'm mindful of Jesus' question to the man with a disability, 'Do you want to get well?' This suggests there may need to be an inner resolve to get well or at least get better. Prayer we might receive is good – and, one has to work at it.

A second aspect is *relational challenges*. This can be in one's extended family, or indeed from time to time in the church community. I'm mindful in this of a priest who in pronouncing the blessing prays for 'those we love and those we struggle to love.' I've found that where possible it's really positive and freeing to be in good relationship with people, otherwise it hankers in one until one does something about the strained relationship. In some instances, it can be very difficult to say sorry, but when one does, it breaks down barriers and opens the way for healing of relationship.

Thirdly for some there's *economic challenges*. Despite welfare and benefits there are ones who in these days are struggling financially. There's no easy quick-fix either. Jesus spoke of bringing 'good news for the poor' – he must have meant we are to help each other and especially those in such circumstances.

And a fourth – there's *spiritual challenges*. These may be in decision-making, and inwardly asking 'what Jesus do?' To seek God's will and way for our lives. The words of the song come to mind 'Turn your eyes upon Jesus....' My seeking is to seek how God may be leading, unfolding the way, '....That we may walk in the way you have prepared for us.'

Another aspect is also relational and that is *forgiveness*. My understanding and experience is that this has a 'God-dimension'. God wants us to be reconciled to one another and forgiveness is a way this can be achieved. When I have forgiven – and let go, the " is released and I feel inwardly lighter. That's why the prayer of the liturgy is so freeing 'to hear 'God forgives you. Forgive others, forgive yourself'. I think this can be also expressed: 'Forgive others, God forgives you. Forgive yourself'. It seems to me this may be the necessary order in the process. The season of Lent not far away now will also remind us of the need to *overcome temptation*. As for Jesus, this can be daunting, yet he walks beside us and helps as he said, 'I am the Way and the Truth and the Life.'

Finally, returning to the theme: 'Put out into the deep...', like those first disciple followers of Jesus, life brings challenges constantly, into the 'unknown', trusting, obeying. I close with the final verse of the earlier mentioned hymn, really a prayer: 'Holy Spirit, teach us how to read the signs, how to meet the challenge of our troubled times. Love us into action, stir us into prayer, till we choose God's life and find our future there.'