

Luke 5.1-11

Following Jesus Together

Amington


Sunday 18 November 2018

Vision Sunday

Vision

An old man went to the optician's. He opened the door and said to the receptionist, 'I think I need my eyes checked.'

'You're not kidding,' she replied, 'This is the ladies' toilet.'

Why is it important to have vision? Let's watch a video – this is from one of my favourite TV programmes, *MythBusters* – who wanted to see if they could move in a straight line while *blindfolded*. First they tried walking in a field... then they tried *swimming* .

Show video 'Blindfolded Swimming'.

It would be super easy for the presenters to swim across the lake in a straight line: all they need to do is look at a fixed point. But with the blindfold on they go round and round in circles.

That is what we are thinking about today: what do we need to fix our eyes on, to stop us going round and round in circles.

There's a verse Proverbs that people often quote to do with vision. *The Message* paraphrase gets it just about right §:

If people can't see what God is doing, they stumble all over themselves; but when they attend to what he reveals, they are most blessed.

Proverbs 29.18 (The Message)

Or, we might say, 'If people lose sight of God, they end up going round and round in circles.'

Our big series going through Mark's gospel has a name, which is on the posters, and there's a slide with it on every week – does anyone know what it is? *Seeing Jesus*.

Friends, the most important thing is to keep our eyes fixed on him – so we don't end up going round and round in circles. Ultimately all churches have the same 'vision', the same 'goal': Jesus.

No Fish

Jesus had a vision for his disciples, and it was all about **fishing**. To explore that I'd like us to look at Luke 5 together.

Before the story begins, Peter – or rather, Simon (Jesus hadn't changed his name to Peter yet) – was already by the shore. He was tired, and fed up – he'd been fishing all night with his companions, and he hadn't caught a thing (5). He'd tried everything, and failed miserably **f**.

Show Simpsons clip: Kids, you tried your best and you failed miserably – the lesson is, never try.

Peter was a good fisherman: he employed other workers and had business partners, so he must have been! But, that night, he'd been unable to catch a single fish.

And now, no doubt desperate for some sleep, he was **washing** his **nets** (2). That's one of those jobs that's ever so important, but you just don't want to do at the end of the day.

Do you have little jobs like that? For me it's tidying my desk – instead of doing it every day, so it never gets really bad, I let it build up for days and days, until it takes a couple of hours to clear the accumulated detritus and rubbish! **f**


Currently on my desk I have five receipts, a book token, an old hard drive, a tea towel, a church Bible, two rolls of parcel tape, the manual for the LED lights in church, two 2019 lectionaries, the Church of England's *Daily Prayer* book, some headphones, a pen, a prayer card, the police officer's card from when we got burgled with our crime number on, a copy of our house insurance form, our parish Christmas card for this year, all the news sheets for today, four cable ties and my church memory stick – and that's not including the stuff that's *supposed* to be on my desk!

Tidying my desk is not my most favourite job.

I imagine washing nets was like that for Peter – *especially* when you've spent all night getting them dirty, and not catching a single fish. 'What a waste of time this is,' I'd be chuntering to myself.

In my imagination – you can probably tell – Peter is in a foul mood. And then there's the other thing – where's Andrew? Peter and Andrew were brothers, and they worked together – so why isn't he mentioned by Luke?

I think it's because, as we know from John 1, Andrew had already left Peter to follow Jesus. He'd introduced Peter to Jesus – but presumably Peter couldn't quite bring himself to follow Jesus – yet.

So, here was Peter – sitting by the shore, cleaning his nets, which he'd got dirty by being up all night, working hard, yet not catching a single fish – *without* his own brother to help him. I imagine he felt a little like this .

Show Flintstones clip of Fred coming home grumbling.

Do you know that feeling? But then it got *even worse* for Peter.

Just then Jesus – the dude who had stolen his brother – arrives with a big crowd of people, who start stepping all over the nets Peter is trying to clean at the edge of the lake.

And *then* Jesus **gets into** *his* boat (3). His *boat*! As if it's not enough, stealing his brother, and then trampling all over his nets!

Poor old Peter just wants to finish washing his nets so he can go home and have a rest... But then Jesus **asks him to put** the boat **out a little from the shore**, to make it easier to teach the crowd (3).

I think Jesus is being deliberately in Peter's face here; he won't let him get away with ignoring him. It's quite a good tactic actually – by using Peter's boat he *forces* Peter to sit and listen to him. He can't get away. He can't finish washing his nets – all he can do, is *listen* to Jesus' teaching.

The final straw comes when Jesus **finishes speaking**. **‘Put out into the deep water,’** Jesus tells Peter, **‘and let down the nets for a catch’** (4).

We’ve all heard people say, ‘We tried that before and it didn’t work.’ You may have said it yourself! As a church leader I hear people say it pretty regularly. If I could ban sentences, it’s one I would ban – except it’s actually in the Bible! When Jesus tells Peter to go fish, he loses it: **‘Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything’** (5). ‘We tried that before and it didn’t work.’ All his tiredness and frustration came out in his response to Jesus – yet *he still does what Jesus asks*: **‘But because you say so, I will let down the nets.’**

That is, the nets Peter has *literally just cleaned*. Can. You. Imagine. Could Jesus be *any more annoying*? Yet Peter does what he asks: he **put out into deep water** (4), **let down the nets** (5), and **caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break** (6). In fact there were so many fish they had to call **their partners in the other boat to come and help them** – and then they **filled both boats so full that they began to sink** (7).

What a good job Peter didn’t get stuck at, ‘We tried that before and it didn’t work.’

Go Fish

A teacher was giving her pupils a lesson in ethics.

‘Here is the situation,’ she said. ‘A man is standing up in a boat in the middle of a river, fishing. He loses his balance, falls in, and begins splashing and yelling for help, because he can’t swim. His wife – who also can’t swim – hears the commotion, and runs down to the bank. What do you think she should do next?’

A little girl raised her hand and suggested, ‘Withdraw all of his savings?’

Peter, James and John were fishermen, they had probably grown up fishing, it was their life, their trade, it was all they knew – but this was their last day at work. § **‘Don’t be afraid,’** Jesus told them, § **‘From now on you will fish for people’** (10).

The King James Bible puts it far better in Matthew 4.19: § **‘Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men [and women].’**

This was Jesus’ vision for Peter, James and John – and Andrew: to go fish, but to fish for people, not, well, fish. And what did they do? Verse 11: **they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.**

Pause

Our Vision: Principles

It's quite something, isn't it? **They left everything and followed** Jesus. They left their homes, they left their jobs, they left their livelihood, they left their friends and they left their families – **they left everything** – to follow Jesus.

Follow (Jesus)

And that's the first of four principles we can take from this passage when it comes to **¶** God's vision for *our lives*: **¶** God calls us to *follow Jesus*. He is our model, our example, our leader. We are *his* people, *his* church, purchased for him by *his* blood. God calls us to follow *Jesus*.

And the flip side of that, is *not* following anything or anyone else – even our own desires. A couple of weeks ago Sophie quoted CS Lewis who said, **'The truth is that God is love may slyly come to mean for us the converse, that love is God.'**

It is ever so tempting to follow our feelings, which are powerful and immediate. But we must hold onto the truth that brings life, which God has spoken to us – both in the person of Jesus Christ and in the words of the Scriptures. **'Lord, to whom shall we go?'** Peter asked, **'You have the words of eternal life'** (John 6.68).

Fish (for people)

Second, as part of following Jesus God calls us to **fish**. Now I've never been fishing, and I really couldn't care less about it – but thankfully God calls us to **fish for people**, not fish.

The church is not a building it is a family – and it should never be static but always *moving*: moving towards God (following Jesus) and moving towards others (fishing for people).

At some point we are going to run a course called Talking Jesus, to help us learn how to fish for people: it isn't about smacking people over the head with a Bible, it isn't about drowning them in theology – but sharing what's most important, sharing the love and grace and forgiveness we have found in Jesus, it's saying, 'Come and see... Come and see for yourself.'

Feed (the hungry)

Third, as part of following Jesus, God calls us to **feed** other people. Admittedly, this is not actually mentioned in the passage – but what do you think they did with all those fish? Jesus, Peter, James and John left them behind – with a crowd by the shore. They ate, and were filled.

Friends, we are surrounded by such need. Some of the poorest and most struggling families in Tamworth live in our parish. Some of them are literally going hungry. Others hunger for company, for compassion, for community.

God calls his people to be a blessing to those around them – to share the gospel yes, but also to share our food, literally and metaphorically. How can *we* feed our neighbours?


Focus

Finally we need to learn how to **f** focus.

There's nothing wrong with fishermen washing nets – in fact it is a really important thing for fishermen to do. It was right for Peter to be mending his nets – until he had to stop. He could not listen to Jesus because he was distracted by washing his nets – so Jesus got in his face and *forced* him to focus.

In church life it is as important to know what to stop as it is to know what to start. There are many things we *could* do – but that does not mean we *should* do all of them. Wisdom means knowing what to stop as much as what to start, because it is always better for churches to focus on a few things, and do them well, than try to do too much, and end up being so distracted we ignore Jesus.

Prayer

To help us with all this, I and one or two others have written a new prayer, which I'd like us to pray every day .

It's on the news sheet – and there will be some little cards with it on soon. I would like us to pray it at every service, at every meeting, at every home group, whenever we pray at home.

Let's pray it now. This is our prayer:

Come Holy Spirit,
and make us one in heart and action,
so we can serve God faithfully: abounding in love,
maturing in holiness, and seeking out the lost.
Help us grow as disciples of Jesus –
in commitment, in depth, and in number –
that we may be a blessing to Amington;
to the glory and praise of God the Father.
Amen.

Our Vision: 2019

§ Those are the general principles: follow, fish, feed and focus. They aren't complicated, but they aren't easy either. They are summed up by our motto, our mission statement, our overall plan: § following Jesus together. I guess having read our passage today we could expand that to § fishing for people together, feeding the hungry together, and focusing in obedience together.

But what about specifics? What are we going to be focusing on in § 2019 as we seek to follow Jesus together?

- § **Socials:** we now have a new social and fundraising team, led by Janet Hine, who will start to increase the number of events we do, to help us grow together, and for us to invite our friends and family to. This is something that almost everyone in the church has told me we need to do more of.
- § **Welcome:** every church thinks they are good at welcoming visitors and new people, but few actually are. Last year I invited a friend, and then a month later my sister to come to a service – almost no-one spoke to them. So we are looking at forming a new team to make sure we give a warm welcome on Sundays.

- **§ Loneliness:** there is an epidemic of loneliness in society today. People are more isolated than ever, and there are fewer community groups than ever. In response to this need we hope to launch a 'Place of Welcome' in May. This will mostly be a social group, with refreshments, and at the end a simple, dementia-friendly act of worship. Over time we will start offering resources for living a healthy lifestyle. This will be an important part of Mandy's work among us.
- **§ Kitchenette:** in order to offer a weekly group like that, we badly need to improve our facilities here in church. If you have ever helped serve refreshments in church you'll know how hard it is. We really need a kitchenette at the back of church, by the main door. It will have a permanent sink, hot water, and proper storage, so things can be tidied away, not just left on the table like we have to do now. We are firming up the costs for this at the moment, but it will be something like £6000. So today I am launching an appeal – like we did for the heating system last winter – to raise extra money to help pay for it. It's a big total, but I'm confident we can get there – having decent kitchen facilities in church would make a huge difference to the welcome we can provide to guests, at everything we do in this building.

At the same time, we will refurbish the toilet. Please pray about whether or not you can contribute to this fund – and if you can, use the yellow envelopes (filled in if you pay tax), making sure you write ‘kitchenette’ across the top.

- **J Kerria:** finally, I am exploring with the Borough Council how we might be able to have a church-run space on the new Kerria Centre being built right now. I can’t give any specifics, because the discussions are at a very early stage. But, having a space on that estate I think is critical to unlocking fruitful mission and ministry there. The CAP Money courses we ran were good – but will only have a limited impact being run in a school, which have negative connotations for many. We need our own space, that we can turn into a beacon of light and hope and love for people who are so often ignored or marginalised by the authorities.

Please pray about those things. Don’t worry about remembering all those details – I am going to write to everyone in the church about it all over the next couple of weeks. For now, please focus on praying the new church family prayer, which you have on your news sheet. And above all, **J** please pray we would keep Jesus at the centre, as our vision, our fixed point as we follow him together.