

Sermon by Venerable Susanna Pain
7 February 2010
Luke 5: 1-11; Epiphany 5C

They were going about their business after a hard night's work, just finishing cleaning their nets and tidying up. They were listening to him speak with one ear, interest piqued, when he asked if he could use their boat as a stage.
'Sure, no trouble!' they said.

This was more activity than they'd seen all night. They pulled out from shore, and they listened. When he'd finished, he suggested that they fish. They only had the night nets, not really appropriate for this time of day – but they did it anyway, and caught fish – nets and boats filled to overflow.... 'Something was moving in us. A change was happening.'

'I was overawed' said Peter, later. 'I felt totally unworthy, unequal to this welling within. All I could do was bow and prostrate myself before him. A strange action for me, though I've felt the feeling once or twice before, in the power of a storm at sea, and in the quiet of the starlit sky just before dawn.

This was inexplicable, overwhelming, raw. Who knows where my life will go from here?

I daren't say it, but this is like Isaiah's vision; the heavens opening — not really, but inside — stars exploding, insight, absolute clarity, another place.

It's not just the fish!! (Though there are plenty of them!)

"Do not be afraid" he says. That's the first time I've heard him say that but not the last. 'Do not be afraid', and I was and I wasn't, in this moment of conversion, one of many in my life.

There was clarity, freedom, opening up...

'fish for people'?

I had no idea what he was talking about but I felt his force, his power, this ... love, was it? Welling up.

I want this.

I will follow.

I can do no other.

I wonder, does anything in Peter's experience resonate with you?

— a searching, a finding and calling from the depths of your being? Does anything at all resonate?

The gist of this reading is about calling — and answering the call from deep within to follow —

In Peter's case to follow the physically present Jesus of Nazareth

In Isaiah's, to follow the God of Israel

In ours, what?

To follow our heart, our yearning

To follow wisdom, to follow Jesus, the Christ in our hearts ...

The power that connects

I've told you I think of my call to ordained ministry. (you can read the sermon on the web).

I've told you too, of my experiences of awe and unworthiness — like at Stroud lying on the ground, or during my ordination feeling the weight of responsibility fall on me ... and then, always, the words 'don't be afraid' and the call to serve, as I am, in my own way. What is your experience — I wonder, of this call thing, this call to follow ... eg. What brought you here to Holy Covenant? What brings you back? What is the shape of this urge to get up early on Sunday — to be here? What took you to the particular work you are doing? Or a particular relationship? Who are you? What purpose does your life serve? I'm interested to hear, if anyone is willing to share some of their story ... Where is Jesus in all this? The church?

Joyce Rupp writes (in *May I have this Dance*) these words in a poem entitled

Seeking and Finding

I search for God,
elusive, hidden God,
I long to dwell
in the heart of Mystery.

I search for my true self,
more of who I already am,
knowing there's so much
yet to be discovered.

I search for love,
the unconditional love
that unfolds me
and asks to be shared.

I search for vision
in the shadows of my soul,
impatiently awaiting
the moment of lighting.

I search for compassion
in a world gone deaf
to the cries of the hurting,
and the plans of the powerless.

I search for Home,
always for Home,
unaware, of course,
that I am already there.

What are the deepest parts of you searching for right now? What about those around you? Does the idea that we are searching for 'Home' and find we are 'already there' give us any insight into our own journey, and the task of evangelism — reaching out to others? In other words, how can we help each other, and those around us 'find Home'? (*Season of the Spirit*, Congregational Life, Advent, Christmas, Epiphany, p115, 2010)

As Peter did ... I read some challenging stuff this week which may be helpful here, from *'The Voluptuous God'* by Robert V Thompson: (Kelowna, BC: Wood Lake Books 2007)

'Meister Eckhart, 13th century mystic wrote 'Do you want to know where to find Christ? Your soul is Christ!' Eckhart suggests that the likeness of God is planted within the soul like a seed. It grows in us. We are born with Christ in us. Our task, as Eckhart puts it is to be good, wise and industrious farmers of this inner seed. If we are the least bit open, it grows. This Christ power doesn't come to us from outside. It happens through us, arising from within.

This Christ power is an inner whisper. It is the still, small voice that speaks to us in every encounter, every relationship, from every being. It is our teacher, doctor within. It is the power to understand without criticising, to perceive without passing judgement, to comprehend without analysing.

God isn't interested in what you do.

- Meister Eckhart

When Meister Eckhart tells us that God isn't interested in what we do, he isn't playing cute. He is cutting to the heart of western spirituality.

Spirituality is not about doing, it is about being. It is about recognising and accepting the fundamental truth that God isn't interested in what we do because nothing we can do can affect his love for us. That love never changes. That love is never earned. That love is never lost.

But that love is never an excuse to do nothing, to watch the poor go hungry and homeless while we sit by, basking in divine favour. It is rather to understand that to be possessed by God's love is to be driven to demonstrate that love by loving others. It is not as a way of gaining God's favour. That can't be done. It's a given. We don't qualify for it. It's not a reward to be withdrawn at any moment, even in that moment when we ignore the needs of the least of our brothers and sisters.

It's not an easy message for 'achievers'. Outright gifts make us uneasy. We prefer to think that we have done something to qualify for this divine largesse.

'Remember me God, I'm the one who ...'

(Silent Hope, Sorin Books, Notre Dame)

LET US PRAY

As this day begins
I need not remind you
of who I am
or what I have done.
I am the one who needs to remember.
I am someone you love.
That is enough.