

Take the Risk ...

... and trust in Jesus

A sermon given on the Fourth Sunday before Lent, 9th February 2025, by the Vicar, the Revd Canon Jonathan Baker, in Beverley Minster.

Luke 5:1-11

"Master, we have worked all night but have caught nothing."

I love these stories in the Bible that speak of scarcity: stories of God providing for widows who have nothing except a little jar of oil; or for crowds who have nothing to eat except five little loaves and two small fish; or for fishermen toiling on a lake all night long and catching nothing. I love them because gospel stories about God responding to scarcity speak to our own sense of scarcity. We worry all the time about our lack: just this week, we've had 400 redundancies announced by the East Riding Council because there's not enough to pay for all those staff and we think what impact is that going to have on our public services; we have President Trump trying to shut down the US Overseas Aid Programme - think of the impact that have on desperately needy people around the world; we worry that there aren't enough people in work to pay for the rising costs of pensions and benefits; individuals worry that there's not enough for their household to make ends meet; even here at the Minster, we're always worrying about not having enough; not enough income to cover our expenses, not enough staff to the organisation; not enough volunteers to fill all the roles. Our world is full of 'not enough'.

In our gospel story Simon Peter is a professional fisherman who can't catch any fish, "*We've worked all night but have caught nothing.*" The irony is the lake is full of fish. There's not actually any shortage, it's just that the resources aren't in the right place. God's creation is good; it's full of life; it is fruitful and abundant; growth is the natural way of things. Yesterday afternoon I spent a little time lopping branches off the vicarage hedge and I was astonished at how much there was and how quickly had grown over a short period of time - it was nothing to do with me, but this huge quantity of timber seemed to have grown up, apparently out of nothing - just sunlight and rainfall. Life is abundant and growth is natural so the real problem is not so much scarcity as alienation. The resources are often there, but we find ourselves disconnected from them. And it's not just an economic problem, it's a spiritual problem. Many people are familiar with that sense of futility in the workplace: you put in all those hours, but where does it get you; we work hard, but sometimes it just doesn't yield results; if only we could catch the wretched fish.

In this story, Jesus connects Peter and the tired and frustrated fishermen with the abundance of God's good creation. In one sense, yes, it's a miracle, but in another sense, it's just people being put in touch with the natural abundance and fruitfulness of God's good creation. But this isn't just a story about the human fear of scarcity being matched by God's generosity and abundance. It's also a story in which Jesus is reminding Peter and his friends that the world is unpredictable and that the answer to living with uncertainty is to embrace a radical faith in the God who can be trusted. So not only does this story address our anxiety about there not being enough, it also addresses our anxiety about living with uncertainty. It's doubly relevant today in these days when we're constantly being reminded that nothing is certain. It's funny, isn't it - all my life I have looked at the world around me and assumed that the leaders of the nations were basically agreed that

there have to be rules and agreements governing international relations. Even when some nations didn't really believe it, they still had to pretend to be playing according to the rules. Suddenly, we not only have Russia invading Ukraine without making any serious attempt to justify it to the international community. We also have a President in the White House threatening to invade Greenland, suggesting ethnic cleansing in Gaza so it can be turned into a seaside resort, slapping trade tariffs on its closest trading partners, and pulling out of the world's most important climate agreement. Suddenly, the world feels very different. We have leaders who thrive on disruption and uncertainty. The future feels dangerously unpredictable, and everyone's anxiety is correspondingly higher.

In our gospel reading, Peter is coping with uncertainty and with the stress of discovering that the world is less predictable than he had thought - you see, he thought he knew the Lake of Gennesaret; he thought he knew where the fish would be at that time of year and at that time of night; but it turned out his experience and expertise counted for nothing. And he would have been anxious about the future: what if the same thing happens tomorrow night and the night after that? What happens to his livelihood then?

Everything seems uncertain and fragile. Jesus's response is to invite him into an even greater loss of control, *"Put out"* says Jesus, *"into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch."* It's not surprising that Simon Peter hesitates - *"Master, we've worked all night but have caught nothing."* But then he takes the risk of trusting Jesus, *"Yet, if you say so, I will let down the nets."* He took the risk of looking stupid in front of all those people on the shore. But he did it - and then the ropes tighten, the nets fill out and the boat rocks with the weight of all those fish in the nets. Simon Peter realises that Jesus can be trusted and that the uncertainty of faith is more sure and reliable than Peter's former confidence in his own skills and ability to master the situation. The lesson learned by Simon Peter, by James and John, is that Jesus can be trusted - so much so that they can leave everything and follow him.

And so for us the answer to the fear of scarcity in the world is to trust the God who has filled his creation with life and the endless capacity to renew itself. The answer to our fear of the future, with all its uncertainty, is to seek always to be in the company of Christ, to follow him and not let anything get in the way; not to run away from the deep water and try and make ourselves safe from it, but actually to seek it out, that we may discover it to be the place where God's faithfulness can be put to the test and is most profoundly experienced.

So may I encourage you this morning, whatever uncertainties you face, wherever you feel your life to be out of control: take the risk of trusting him with your scarcity and with everything you lack, and let him provide; take the risk of trusting him with your future, with all its dangers and unknowns, and find in him your rock, your sanctuary, your strong tower; take the risk of surrendering control, that you may listen to his word, choose to obey him, and put out into the deep, that you may test his faithfulness, discover his good purpose for you, and taste his goodness.

But first, you have to let go of everything, everything that gets in the way - and then follow him.

Reading Text

Luke 5:1-11

¹ Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gennesaret, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, ² he saw two boats there at the shore of the lake; the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. ⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.' ⁵ Simon answered, 'Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets.' ⁶ When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. ⁷ So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats, so that they began to sink. ⁸ But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, 'Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!' ⁹ For he and all who were with him were amazed at the catch of fish that they had taken; ¹⁰ and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. Then Jesus said to Simon, 'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.' ¹¹ When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him.