

Letting Jesus into the boat
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High Street Uniting Church Frankston
David Fotheringham

Read: Luke 5:1-11

Loving God, Grant us faith to hear your word and respond to your claims on our lives. Amen.

The story of Jesus, the son of a carpenter, taking Peter the fisherman out in the boat and directing him to an enormous haul of fish is a wonderful, concentrated drama which sets us up well to get to know both Jesus and Peter, a disciple who will have some serious ups and downs but to whom Jesus will always be faithful.

Perhaps we are all disciples who have some serious ups and downs but to whom Jesus will always be faithful. So as we look at this story today I want to invite you to think about your own story in relation to Peter's story here. Even if you don't know one end of a fishing rod from the other you might be able to place yourself in the movements of the story.

We see three or four stages of Peter's calling all in the space of these few verses. You might currently be at any one of these stages. For many of you though, the first stage will be an exercise in remembering.

Because the first thing that happens in this story, from Peter's point of view, is that Peter lets Jesus into the boat. I wonder if you can recall when you first let Jesus into your own life – when you first thought that there's something here in Jesus or in his teaching that's worthy of attention. Maybe it starts with resonating with and listening for Jesus' teachings about justice and compassion. Or maybe you came from a family of faith and were brought up to pay attention; or maybe you heard or read about Jesus or were invited to a rally or a service or a camp. Or maybe you just came into a church with a big picture of a boat in the window - here! And maybe you hear Jesus' words in this context. But just letting Jesus in, being prepared to listen to him – that's the first step that Peter takes, when Peter lets Jesus into his boat.

Maybe we can identify with something similar: our first recognition that Jesus has something good to say something important for society and for us, in society. As we heard last week, Jesus is all about proclaiming good news to the poor and freedom for the oppressed and captive, in the power of the Holy Spirit; sharing the love and compassion of God.

Peter then experiences a next step, which you might be able to identify or relate to as well. Jesus asks Peter to go out into deeper water, and to put out the nets. This is where you start to take some steps in response to Jesus' call. It could be through joining a Bible study

group, joining in the regular life of the church, or joining in with a group committed to providing food or community or care for those who need it.

Peter had a level of uncertainty about this, but he gave it a go. There are ways in which we do this as a church, too: starting a playgroup or a BBQ or ministering at the Uni or getting involved with Operation Larder are ways of having a go.

Last week the Church Council prayed and talked about ways that we might get involved with the Winter Shelter program, which provides accommodation in churches for homeless people during the winter months.

We also considered how we might respond to Jesus' proclamation of release to the captives when there are refugees caught up in seemingly endless detention.

These could be some of the next deep waters that Jesus is calling us to. So, next month will be starting to look for volunteers who might be interested in helping with the Winter Shelter program in the churches across Frankston. And when the next High Street Times comes out we will be looking to see if there are a few people interested in forming a social justice group who might look into responses to the way-prolonged detention of refugees.

If this is a step into deeper water that sounds like the right step for you, I'd be very pleased to hear from you any time – you don't have to wait until next month.

For all of us, significant experiences of life and of God involve stepping out of the shallows sometimes, stepping out of the safe places and into the deeper waters. They say that boats are safe in harbours, but that's not what boats are built for. For us, too, as a church, we have a calling to be a community of inclusion and care, seen in our love; but we don't just stay safe in the harbour.

Certainly, what happens next for Peter is that he finds himself leaving the harbour behind.

But this is not just Peter rising to a next-level challenge. This actually just represents Peter understanding both God and himself and Jesus a whole lot more.

In the light of his experiences, Peter revisits his understanding of who God is. Peter recognises that God is present to him in the person immediately in front of him. In particular, God is present in this Jewish teacher who is going around proclaiming and living compassion and grace and wholistic care for people. And that's what God's like. Because people are important to God.

When I gave up a career in Physics, this was why. It didn't come from a definitive call to "leave everything behind and come and follow" – and neither is that described for Peter here. When we recognise that God is at work among people, then one way or another other priorities can fall away. That's what happened to Peter. It may not be about changing

careers, but when we keep a focus on who God is, and how God is, our own priorities become shaped accordingly. As individuals and as a church community together.

According to this passage Jesus doesn't so much ask Peter to leave everything as assure him that he needn't be afraid even as 'embracing people in life' was going to become Peter's new priority, because of Peter's understanding of God, his relationship with God. There was a kind of inevitability about prioritising people and love.

As a congregation, our priorities are all about embracing people in life because that's where we find God at work. Sometimes that means going out to deep waters. It may mean taking imaginative risks, as individuals and together, but the central thing is remembering why: because of what we see God prioritising in Jesus; and hearing his assurance to not be afraid.

When we let Jesus into the boat, or respond to the call to try the deeper water, or find ourselves changing our priorities because of the love of God – we are following the story of Peter. And we know from the gospel that through it all, in all of the ups and downs, Jesus will be faithful to us.

Thanks be to God.