

Sermon – 6th February 2022

“It's a dangerous business, Frodo, going out your door. You step onto the road, and if you don't keep your feet, there's no knowing where you might be swept off to.” (Bilbo Baggins to Frodo Baggins, recalled by Frodo as he travelled from Hobbiton to Buckland with Sam, Merry and Pippin, from *The Lord of the Rings*, J. R. R Tolkien)

The Lord of the Rings is one of my favourite tales, especially when read as part of the greater canon of works set in Tolkien's Middle Earth. I'd better not mention such wonderful stories as Beren and Lúthien or I'll go off on such a tangent that we won't ever get to the actual sermon! Suffice to say that the Lord of the Rings is a tale of journey and adventure – not to mention magic, ancient races, and the clash between good and evil – but the themes I'd like to draw on this morning are those of journey and adventure.

This morning's gospel reading is the beginning of such a tale. It is the story about a fisherman who was going about his day-to-day life. By this account he had got to the end of a frustrating, not to mention fruitless, night when Jesus called him to join him and begin the greatest adventure of his life. There were others present, not least of all James and John, but I want to focus on Simon here.

Jesus stepped into Simon's life and asked him to help in what he was doing. He had just completed a long night of arduous, hazardous work when this itinerant preacher walks up and asks him to adjust to *his* timetable and provide him with a floating pulpit!

His willingness to help, however, was rewarded in the form of the reported miraculous catch of fish, once he had finished preaching.

It was this reward – and sign – that opened Simon's eyes, at least in part, to who Jesus was – ‘Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!’ – and so his response to Jesus' subsequent call to leave everything and follow him is understandable.

Have any of us ever spent any time thinking about what it would mean for a subsistence-level fisherman to leave his only employment and follow an itinerant preacher? He was having to consider leaving the only source of employment he had and so, in following Jesus, he was placing his life into his care – trusting in him in a way that doesn't really come through in the passage at first reading.

I wonder if there is anyone here this morning thinking, ‘well, I've given my life to Christ; I'm a Christian so this doesn't really apply to me – I think I'll take a nap for the next 10 minutes.’ Before you do, I would like to suggest that Jesus' call to leave everything and follow him is one that is made repeatedly during our lives.

And so, I ask you, is there some aspect of your life that Jesus may be calling on you to leave behind?

While we may not have experienced tangible miracles in our lives that have given us pause, and prompted us to think about what we're doing with our lives, I would suggest that God does speak to us, in other ways.

Is there a part of your life that niggles at you when you think about it, or doesn't sit entirely comfortably with you?

Could this be something that God is asking you to consider?

Ask him.

Ask him. It can be a dangerous thing, to ask the Lord of all creation for guidance, for he is also the Lord of truth and will not lie to you. I speak from experience. Before I came up here to train for ordination, I was a development chemist in the hop industry. It was a well-paid, 4-day-a-week job and I was part of a good team of people; the tiresome aspects (company politics etc.) all had their origins in places outside of our small team. But it niggled at me. When I gave thought to who I was, or rather, as I became more aware of who God had made me to be, and so who I was becoming, I began to realise that this type of job wasn't the best fit for me. I looked around but didn't find any alternative jobs that really resonated with me. I then asked God, 'who did *you* make *me* to be? What should I be doing with my life?' Suffice to say, I wasn't expecting the answer I received! I did, however, leave everything and follow him. (Granted, with my possessions in a van!) Was it scary? That question should really be, 'is it scary?! Yes, yes, it is: I do not know where God is leading me; I do not know what he has in store for me; I do not know when, or if, he will bless me in certain ways. I do, however trust him. And that makes all the difference in the world.

Honestly.

The Lord shall make good his purpose for me; your loving-kindness, O Lord, endures forever; forsake not the work of your hands. (Ps. 138: 8)

What's niggling you?

Whether it be something small or large, offer it up to God in prayer. Ask our Lord – *your Lord* – what he is asking of you. How is he seeking to make good his purpose for you?

Does he perhaps want you to work with him in something that he is currently doing? This might involve sacrifice on your part, but sacrifice to the Lord is never received by him unnoticed.

Is he perhaps calling you to leave some aspect of your life behind? This might not be something 'bad' or sinful. It might be – it might be that he's nudging you to finally tackle that thing that you've known for a while that you should deal with. But this may, on the other hand, involve a recognition that a season of your life has come to an end, and so may involve leaving behind a genuine fruitful period. That can be hard, but don't begrudge it; rather, step into your life's new season hand-in-hand with Christ, trusting in him to lead you onward. He is faithful to equip those who place their trust in him.

So, as we look forward, let us not forget what has gone before – what we have already received from God.

I would remind you, brothers and sisters, of the good news which I proclaimed to you, which you in turn received, in which also you stand, through which also you are being saved, if you

hold firmly to the message that I proclaimed to you – unless you have come to believe in vain.
(1 Cor. 15: 1-2)

All of us move from season to season as our lives progress. Simon began as a fisherman, was called by Jesus to follow him as his disciple, went on to become an apostle, and ended his life a martyr. Our lives may not involve such huge changes – or they may – but changes will come – God will call us onward, that is certain. What is not certain is how we will respond.

Friends, if God is calling you to leave something, then leave it, trusting in him; if he is calling you to somewhere, or something, new, follow, trusting in him.

Amen.