**6 February 2022**

A few weeks back Vicar Mike referenced one of my favourite TV programmes – “*Bob and Paul Gone Fishing*”. If you haven’t seen it you’re missing a treat – gentle, humorous, beautiful, glorious, touching, life affirming TV. I can’t get enough of it.

Two old friends, comedians Paul Whitehouse and Bob Mortimer, who have both had major heart surgery and faced the fragility of life now find comfort and fellowship and encouragement in eachother’s company.

I’ll come back to speaking about them later, but for now let’s look at Jesus’ call to those first disciples.

Central to the call we find Jesus’ power - transforming the lives of humble fishermen. We see Jesus the enabler - “I will make you fishers of people” or in Mark’s Gospel “fishers of men”.

The fishermen have been fishing all night – the best time to fish when it is cooler and the fish will be more active, and yet they have caught little or nothing. Jesus instructs them to fish now, in the heat of the day, a time that the fishermen know would be ludicrous to throw out their nets.

How many times have you faced someone telling you how to do what you think you know how to do best? A busy body maybe who thinks they can tell you how to do something better? Well, here’s Jesus doing something similar with Simon and Andrew.

But look how Simon Peter addressed Jesus here - he calls Jesus “Master”. Already Simon recognises and acknowledges Jesus’ authority.

So this is not an instantaneous and chance encounter in which Jesus just says “Follow me” to total strangers who then gave up the work that has supported them and their families. Simon already knows Jesus and knows of Jesus’ teachings.

But it does seem something special is needed – it would not have been enough for Jesus just to have Simon and Andrew to follow him.

Told to throw out their nets Simon and the other fishermen follow the instruction and the result is a miraculous catch – too big for just one boat to bring in.

The biggest catch of their lives, a true fortune for them, more fish than they could ever believe was possible, a catch like no other seen before or no doubt since on Lake Galilee.

Faced with the miraculous catch – in awe of what has just happened, Simon Peter realises that when he is invited by Jesus to join his Team, there is only one possible answer – YES!

Later on in John 15, Jesus would tell His disciples, *“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should bear much fruit”.*

In truth those fish would no doubt have been divided up between those on the shore – the families of the fishermen and amongst those who were there to listen to Jesus.

It would have been madness for the first disciples to just abandon their boats or leave the fish to rot in the sun.

Here, as elsewhere, there is a re-assurance given first – “*Do not be afraid*”.

There’s comfort in these words of persuasion – “*you can leave these earthly things behind”,* Jesus is saying*, “if you follow me you don’t need any of this, for I have other ways to take care of you*”.

Like Simon and Andrew, we are called to love Jesus, because he loved us first, and we commit ourselves to Jesus because he committed his life to us and for us.

Maybe you are in the safety of the crowd on the shoreline of the lake, separated from the scene and comfortable where you are.

Maybe you are at the back of the crowd – not wanting to be too close, but intrigued all the same and just about able to hear.

Maybe you are there in the boat, straining to bring the catch in, eager to join in the mission to maximise the haul.

This is the how the Kingdom is built. With people all at different stages, all in different circumstances.

It has been said that Christians are made not born.

Discipleship requires us to continue to walk the journey of faith with others, to encourage, nurture and feed them, not just to point them in the right direction and leave them to it but to pray with them and for them, to teach them and to learn from them.

Discipleship and witness is about living out the Gospel. By seeing visible, authentic examples of the Christian faith in our community

The Kingdom is not only built in here – but out there. The Kingdom is all around us – God is in everything – and is interested in everyone. Discipleship is for every day not just Sunday.

When Bob and Paul go fishing Paul is the accomplished fisherman. Bob is the novice. Paul knows where to cast the line, he knows the best bait to use, he assesses the river and its ebb and flow. He guides Bob, counselling him where to also fish, which bait to use, where on the river to cast the line.

It is a running theme in Gone Fishing that when Bob has a catch we often find him furiously and excitedly trying to reel in the catch, and Paul correcting and counselling him, “*Don’t wind, I told you not to wind*”! Patience is indeed a virtue in fishing and in life!

We can all be more like Paul Whitehouse, encouraging others how to follow God and remaining patient, but we need to accept that at times we also need to be like Bob Mortimer too – eager to learn from the experience of others and accepting that we will make mistakes along the way.

Our personal ministry may be no more complicated than simply welcoming others, perhaps like Jesus welcoming those that society considers unimportant or irrelevant. Our ministry may be the serious business of being hospitable, of blessing, or praying, even of playing.

All our callings and our responses are to one end – to grow the Kingdom, not for the sake of the Kingdom in itself but for the sake of those brought into a relationship with God.

How?

Well by the work of our ministry team yes, of course, but also, as befrienders, as social walkers, as knitters and natters, as woodworkers, as Thirsty Thursday drinkers, and also whenever and wherever the opportunity exists to simply be people of God - that others might see something in us that is in some small way different, inspiring, compelling, intriguing, comforting.

Taking Jesus as our example and our guide, and with the encouragement of the Holy Spirit, it really is time for us all to choose our bait, cast our line, and to “go fishing”. **AMEN**