

Fishers of Men 2025 – February 9th, 2025

(Isaiah 6:1-8; Luke 5:1-11)

From now on, said Jesus, I will make you fish for people. And they left their nets, and followed him.

Fishing for people. Drawing people in, bringing them to Jesus. Into his nets, into his boat.

For some, that is the entire point of the Church. That's what we exist for, and what everything we do is aimed at – catching more fish. Or as it says in our Mission Action Plan, making new disciples. Or, to use the dreaded E-Word: evangelism.

Why 'dreaded'? Well, because for many people evangelism has got a lot of negative connotations. Maybe you think of slightly bonkers looking people haranguing pedestrians on Watford High Street. Or of slick American preachers doing the hard sell on TV, and raking in the money at the same time. Or maybe just of people who seem unable to resist ramming religion down people's throats. Embarrassingly enthusiastic at best; crassly insensitive at worst.

For whatever reason, 'evangelism' does seem to be one of those words lots of us have hang-ups with.

And yet, it seems fairly unavoidable. In both our readings this morning, the same pattern is there: once you draw near to God, the first thing He does is turn you around, and send you off to tell others. That's what happened to Isaiah, when he heard the angels crying 'holy, holy, holy': the next thing is that God was asking, 'whom shall we send, who shall go for us?' and Isaiah said, here I am, send me. And it's the same for Peter and Andrew on the lake at Galilee. From now on, you'll be fishing for people. Going to other people, saying what's been seen, bringing God's message, gathering people in – evangelism – doesn't really seem to be a choice for God's people. It's just what comes naturally.

And yet, it doesn't for me. I'm uncomfortable, edgy, anxious about this whole business of evangelism. And I say that as a vicar! Like many Christians of a certain type, I'd *much* rather be praying or doing good or loving the music or reading the Bible than actually, really, trying to fish for people. Really seeking to bring others to faith.

Why is that? Why the reluctance?

The negative connotations are a big part of it.

I also think personal shyness and awkwardness and not being very good at talking about God to people also come into it. Even for vicars, that's true.

But more fundamentally, perhaps, there's also an element of not being entirely sure of *why* we should be doing this. *Why* does it matter if people hear the Gospel or not? Whether they believe it, or not?

It's very easy, you see, to explain why evangelism is important if you really believe that people *have* to get to know Jesus, that they *have* to have faith, because if they don't, then they're going to Hell. But I don't believe that, and I hope you don't. I don't think people are in any kind of danger, if they don't believe. I don't think, in that sense, that people need saving. God's just not like that. (And if He was, I'm not sure any of us should be working for him). We don't have to be so *anxious*.

But if it's not about that, what is it about? Why tell people about Jesus if it doesn't matter?

Well, that's the thing, isn't it. Something can matter a very great deal, and still not be something about which you need to feel fear. Maybe, by contrast, it's something wonderful. Something beautiful. Something full of life and beauty and power and goodness, something you want to tell others about just because it's reality makes you glad?

That's why I tell people about Jesus – or at any rate, why I would, when I'm not shy, or distracted, or confused, or when I've let too many other things get in the way. It's like Isaiah in the Temple; it's like the fishermen by the lake. I've seen something, in this Jesus, in this place. And that something makes me glad.

What have I seen? That we're not rubbish. That misery and sadness don't define us. That my guilt can be put away. That there's a great mercy at the heart of everything, which takes all my batteredness and nurses it back to life. That all the failure and all the exhaustion of life is held by something bigger, stronger, and deeper, which never lets go, which makes all things new. That I can get to know that something, get to sink into it, get remade in it, through learning to pray. Through receiving it here, in bread and wine. That I can trust that everything, but everything, is touched with hope. That all of this is made real in one man, whose name is Jesus.

If I've known that, why wouldn't I tell? Why wouldn't I want to share that, with everyone? It's not because I'm anxious; it's because I'm glad. As St. John puts it, in Him is life - the life of the world.

There's a lot of awfulness about evangelism. There's much that's embarrassing, much that is cringeworthy, much that is corrupt and objectionable. All heard, all granted. Still, at the heart of it, remember there's simply this. Jesus. The one in whom we've found, in whom we've at least begun to find, life, in all its fullness. Think of Him. Think of the people around you who need Him. Pray that they will find Him. And ask how you might

be part of the way that happens. That's all that's meant. From now on, you'll be fishing for people. AMEN.