

Sermon Series:

# Who is this man?

Jesus' early ministry (Luke 3-9)

## **FOLLOWING JESUS – Luke 5:1-11; Psalm 25:4-11**

Becky Douglass (09/06/2024)

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I grew up in Newcastle 1970s and early 1980s when coal and steel ran the town. Most of my friends left school after Year 10 to go into apprenticeships or traineeships with the mines, BHP, or related industries – either in the trades or in the office. These involved some classes, but they were mostly on-the-job training. This is a very good way to learn skills needed while getting necessary experience. It gave them the opportunity to be exposed to different situations, try new things and even make mistakes, all while benefitting from the skill and experience of others around them. I remember that they grew up quickly as they earned money, developed confidence and gained independence. Most of them were living away from home, buying cars and houses while I was still studying. I envied them!

Jesus would have grown up as Joseph's apprentice. He was known in His community as a carpenter and the son of Joseph the carpenter. As He starts His public ministry, He begins to gather His own apprentices - not to become carpenters, but to learn how to carry on his work of spreading the kingdom of God. In today's story, we see Jesus gradually bringing Peter into a greater understanding of who He is and a greater commitment to Him through a process which will continue through his "apprenticeship" as Jesus' disciple.

### **Stage 1 - Connection**

Jesus has moved from his home town of Nazareth in the hill country, to Capernaum on the shores of Lake Galilee or Lake Gennesaret as Luke calls it. People are beginning to follow Him around to hear what He has to say. The crowd is getting bigger and harder to manage.

This day, as He is teaching, Jesus encounters Peter, his brother Andrew and their fishing partners, James, and John. The Gospel of John tells us they had been introduced to Jesus by John the Baptist, and had been aware of Jesus for a while. A short time before this event, Jesus had visited Simon's house and healed Simon's mother-in-law who had a fever. So, Peter had come to have some knowledge of Jesus and some respect for His teaching and power to heal.

Jesus asks Peter to help Him by letting Him sit in His boat and pushing it out a ways from the shore while he teaches. This is a very practical solution. The water amplifies Jesus'

voice, and He isn't pushed around by the crowd as much. Through His previous interactions, Jesus has made a positive connection with Peter. Peter seems happy to help in this way.

All of us here have this kind of connection with Jesus, just by our presence here this morning. We know something about Him, have probably seen Him at work in someone else's life and are happy to be associated with Him as a "churchgoer". It doesn't cost us much, or challenge our lives, but we're not rejecting Him, we're open to Him being a part of our lives. This is a good first step! But Jesus is not content to just make a connection with Peter – or with us.

## **Stage 2 – Trust**

After He finished talking to the crowd, Jesus turns to Peter and says,

*"Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch" (v. 4)*

While Peter was happy to have Jesus sit in his boat, now He was meddling in something He didn't know anything about. The kind of nets they were using were only used for night fishing when the fish couldn't see the nets and so didn't get out of the way when they were dragged along. They didn't work during the day. Obviously, Jesus knows nothing about fishing – He is just a carpenter after all!

*"Master, we have worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." (v. 5)*

There are a couple of things we notice here that show us Peter's growing trust in Jesus. He calls Jesus "Master" which shows He has some idea that Jesus is more than an ordinary man. He is willing to look up to Him in some matters, although He is not sure about Jesus' credentials in fishing! Peter knows there is no fish out there – he and his friends have spent all night, drawing on their fishing knowledge and experience, trying to find them. However, he has also recently seen Jesus heal his mother-in-law. Maybe, just maybe, Jesus is able to do something unexpected. So, he tentatively trusts Jesus and does what He says. However, he makes sure that everyone knows that it isn't his crazy idea – he's just doing what Jesus told him to do!

How much like Peter we are! We know that Jesus knows us, loves us, is able to help us through anything. But we are still so tentative to trust Him, aren't we? Especially when He is doing something which doesn't make any sense to us – because obviously we know our own lives better than He does! We know how things work and what needs to happen. We're happy to trust God when He follows our plan, but so very tentative to trust Him when He seems to be taking us in a different direction. I'm so glad He doesn't give up on us, as He didn't give up on Peter. Jesus accepts our tentative, faltering steps of faith and uses them to take us deeper into relationship with Him.

## **Stage 3 – Humility**

Peter, Andrew, James, and John take their boats out once again and let down their nets, and the fish come swarming into them! I don't know if Jesus somehow called the fish from other parts of the lake or if he just knew the right place to go to find them. Either was possible for the creator of the fish and the sea. And Jesus didn't just give them a good

catch; He gave them an overwhelming catch – they almost sank their boats trying to bring all the fish to shore! Somehow, this carpenter was a better fisherman than those who had been fishing all their lives.

Peter often reacts impulsively, getting himself into trouble. But this time, this is a good thing as he immediately acknowledges the situation. He falls to his knees saying,

*“Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man.” (v. 8)*

Notice that his title for Jesus has changed from “Master” to “Lord”. That might seem the same thing in English, but in Greek, this is an elevation of Jesus. Master is a polite term a bit like “Sir” or “Madam”. “Lord” is a recognition of power and authority. Peter realises his expectations of Jesus need to be revised and that he is not worthy to be in Jesus’ presence. In this new-found humility, Peter acknowledges that he is not as good as he thought he was. He is a sinner – a term used for anyone in need of divine, gracious help.

I am so glad that being a “sinner” doesn’t have to force us away from Jesus. In fact, humbly acknowledging our sinfulness is the first step in receiving God’s grace. In our reading from Psalms this morning, we read:

*Good and upright is the Lord; therefore he instructs sinners in his ways.*

*He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. (Psalm 25:8,9)*

If we are willing to humbly admit our need, God is always willing to teach us how to do better. Being teachable is essential to being a good disciple. Our failures are no problem to God. He is more than able to pick us up, dust us off, and set us back on the right track. But He can do nothing until we are willing to admit that we need help. Peter often made mistakes by reacting impulsively, but he was always also quick to admit he was wrong and so God was able to forgive him and teach him to do better.

#### **Stage 4 – Commitment**

But Jesus wasn’t finished with Peter yet. He had bigger plans for this impulsive fisherman. First, he assures Peter, *“Don’t be afraid”*. (v. 10) Jesus is not going to walk away from him. Yes, Jesus is far more than Peter knows at this stage. Yes, Peter does not have it all together. But Peter doesn’t need to be afraid of Jesus or his rejection.

Secondly, in the other Gospel accounts of this event (see Matthew 4:19 and Mark 1:17) we read that Jesus invites Peter, and his brother Andrew and friends James and John to *“come and follow me”*. This isn’t just an invitation to go on a trip around the area with Jesus. This is an invitation to be Jesus’ disciples, Jesus apprentices. Far from walking away from Peter, Jesus is inviting him into a deeper relationship with him.

Finally, Jesus tells them what they will be learning to do – to *“fish for people”*. (v. 10) The words Luke uses are interesting. Earlier, when he was talking about catching fish, he has used words related to hunting or taking prisoners – they are obviously predatory words. Scott’s brother was involved with competitive bass fishing for a while. When he talked about what he did, it was definitely about mastering and dominating the fish for his own advantage! However, when Luke talks about fishing for people, he uses a word that conveys the idea of capturing something alive, even rescuing something for life. It is a

positive word. Jesus is inviting Peter to become his apprentice in the work of bringing good news to the poor and releasing the captives.

How do Peter, Andrew, James, and John respond to this invitation?

*“So they pulled their boats up on the shore, left everything and followed him. (v. 11)*

Think this means that they even left that miraculous catch of fish! Their commitment to Jesus is immediate and total. Jesus had gradually led them to this point, and He knew when they were ready to follow Him. Over the course of the coming years, they would have much to learn. They would have to go back to Steps 2 & 3 and learn to trust Jesus again and again as He took them into new circumstances and opened up new ideas to them. But that is what being an apprentice is all about – watching, asking questions, trying new things, making mistakes, trying again – slowly gaining competence and experience.

You see, being a follower of Jesus isn't just about believing that certain doctrines are true or obeying certain rules of behaviour. It is about getting to know Jesus, learning to trust Him, and living new lives that reflect His character and point people to Him. Doctrines and rules are a part of this, but they are like the classes you take as part of an apprenticeship. They give you the important theory, but it is the hands-on experience you get in on the job, under the direction of someone more experienced, that makes you a skilled worker. And if we follow Jesus, we are learning from a perfect, but also merciful and patient teacher.

## **Conclusion**

How is Jesus calling you to follow Him? If you are here today, then you have already placed yourself in connection with Jesus. I am so glad that you are here to learn more about Him and identify with Him in some way.

But Jesus calls us to actively follow Him – to be His apprentice as we learn to trust Him, live like Him, and share His message of salvation with others. Like Jesus' disciples, we will have the opportunity to learn the lesson of trust many times. I wish it were a one-off choice to trust Him, but it isn't! Our independence and desire to have things happen the way we want them to is strong. Don't misunderstand me, I believe Jesus invites us to pray to Him and ask Him for our needs, to bring every part of lives to Him for guidance and provision. But we have our own ideas on how we want things to happen, don't we? Like Peter, we think we know how things work. But God sometimes has different ideas and sometimes He wants to show us that He is able to do more than we can imagine. We need to be careful our requests don't turn into demands for a specific outcome.

I spent most of Thursday night in Bankstown Hospital's Emergency Department. Since childhood, I have had a condition which makes my heart go into a rapid, irregular heartbeat. Usually, it rights itself fairly quickly. I've been taught some ways to help this happen and it usually resolves within five or ten minutes. However, this time, after about an hour and a half it was still going strong, and I realised that I needed some help. Why do these things always happen in the middle of the night?! Anyway, we went into the hospital and received very good care, however the medication they gave me wasn't helping and they started to talk about shocking my heart back to a normal rhythm with a defibrillator. It has never been necessary to do that before and I didn't like the sound of it at all! I lay there praying, "God, this is not the right time for this to happen. You have to stop this now. I need to go home

and get some sleep because I have a sermon to finish and a service coming up in just two days! Why are you allowing this now? It's time to do your stuff, God!" But God didn't do anything, and I was getting anxious – which didn't help my heart any. And then I remembered what I have often said to others – "Instead of demanding that God do what you think He should do, just tell God the situation and trust Him to know what is best. He may have a solution that you would never think of. Trust His love for you and His power that is greater than the worst thing you can imagine. He will be able to carry you through whatever might happen. He is already on the job working things out." I needed to trust God and have the humility to admit that God just might have a better idea of what needed to happen than I did. My prayers changed and I relaxed as I gave the situation over to Him. In the end, I didn't need to be shocked. The medication they were giving me made me vomit and that was all the shock I needed. A bit messy and embarrassing, but effective! I recovered quickly from there and we got home in time for a late breakfast. I was able to rest on Friday and God guided my sermon writing yesterday and here we are. Another lesson in trusting God.

As God takes us into new circumstances where we have new opportunities to trust Him and learn to follow Him, then we are able to share these lessons with others. We won't just be sharing doctrines and rules, but the power of God in our lives. We will be living examples of God's salvation. This will "catch" people and draw them into His life better than anything else.

Peter made many more mistakes during his apprenticeship as Jesus' disciple. But Jesus was very patient with Him. If Jesus could make Peter into a pillar of the church and a vibrant and bold witness, then He can teach us as well. It doesn't matter who we are or what our life has been up to this point; how often we make mistakes or how hard we find it to trust Him. Jesus will be a merciful and patient teacher. We just need to follow Him.