

SERMON TRANSCRIPT



Ormskirk Christian Fellowship
Sunday 25 May 2014

Luke 5 : 1-11 (NIV)

One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, the people were crowding around him and listening to the word of God.

² He saw at the water's edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets. ³ He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

⁴ When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."

⁵ Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

⁶ When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. ⁷ So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

⁸ When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" ⁹ For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, ¹⁰ and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon's partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people." ¹¹ So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

Get Back In the Boat

I have to be honest friends ... I don't really like the modern translations of this passage, or the way that they describe the words of Jesus to Peter, "from now on you will fish for people." When I grew up, before political correctness came into fashion and nobody felt the need to use more generic language for stuff like this, I can remember my bible describing Peter as being a "fisher of men." Forgive me if that offends anyone, but because it's the way I remember this verse, that's how I'm going to keep referring to it this morning. It is God's desire (it was back then, and it still is now), that we be fishers of men.

I don't know how many of you have ever been to an aquarium, but I've visited an aquarium a couple of times now. The first time was to an old fashioned kind of aquarium, where you could walk around the room, looking at the different kinds of fish in large glass tanks with pictures and labels and information about each kind of fish printed on cards underneath. The second time was to one of those new generation aquariums, with a glass tunnel and a traveller thing on the floor ... you know the kind of contraption I mean ... a squashed escalator thing without any steps? Well anyway, all of this was underground, and I get quite claustrophobic at times, so although I was standing still, the floor kept moving, there was all this water passing over my head, and then there were all these different kinds of fish swimming about ... let me tell you friends, I felt ill. It wasn't good ... I didn't enjoy that experience at all.

But one thing I noticed at both of the aquariums I visited, is that there were men and women dressed in uniforms, and they were in charge of looking after the fish. That was their job. They would feed the fish, they would clean the tanks, they would make sure that the fish were safe ... all of these things were their responsibility, part of their duties, but although they were surrounded by fish, they weren't doing any fishing. In fact, if you wanted to be sacked from a place like that, I reckon the quickest way would probably be to drop a line into one of the tanks with a worm on it, and see what you could catch for dinner! Thankfully, the staff that I saw weren't doing any fishing - they were just keepers of the aquarium.

Well before I even begin to look at the passage this morning, let me make one point right from the very outset ... in our day and age, far too many churches have forgotten about the need to be fishers of men, and have become keepers of the aquarium. It's an amazing thing that has happened ... their soul-winning zeal has become stagnant, and all they do now is swim about in circles. Don't get me wrong ... I'm not suggesting that this has become the case in OCF, but I am suggesting that it's an ever-present danger we must always be alert to. Let me give you a couple of examples to illustrate what I mean.

When I was younger, I had a goldfish bowl. How many of you had a goldfish bowl? A simpler, and more basic kind of aquarium you'll never see. The goldfish would swim around the bowl, briefly, for about two weeks, until it died. The nice thing was, by the time you'd got sick of feeding it, it was usually belly up anyway, so you'd take it to the toilet, and give it a burial at sea. But today, if your kids ask you for an aquarium, you can't just give them a goldfish bowl, oh no, it's a big deal ... you can spend hundreds on equipment ... filters, aerators, ferns, coral, plants, rocks and all kinds of fancy decorations ... and if you're lucky, the fish might survive until the end of the month.

In our day and time, there are churches spending colossal amounts of money maintaining their buildings, who don't have enough money left in the budget to evangelise any more. Now I'm not against spending money to have a nice building, or paying extra to meet somewhere that offers a better environment for what we're trying to achieve, but the problem in some circles, is that it comes at the price of soul-winning ... in too many places, more gets spoken about the state of the church roof, than the importance of knowing Jesus. There's something wrong!

Here's another example. The fish today are better fed than they've ever been. I don't know if you've been to a pet shop recently, but there's an overwhelming variety of animal food for all manner of different pets, especially it seems to me, for cats. Now I'm not a great cat lover, but I don't want to be critical of those of you who own a cat either. It just seems ridiculous (to me), that people would pay £5 for a tin of cat food, just because it's described on the label as being 'gourmet' ... I mean, how do you know that it's 'gourmet'? Have you tried it? Have you conducted some scientific comparisons? Or did you just sit down and discuss these things with your cat? It's a marketing ploy! The variety of stuff we have on sale in our pet shops seems almost endless, but in church circles, that's becoming true as well.

In this day and age, there has never been a time when the bible has been more accessible to so many people, in so many different ways, but less read. There has never been a time when we've had a such a wide variety of Christian educational opportunities ... colleges, schools, teaching programmes, online courses and study materials ... never a time when God's people have had access to so many, quality resources, and never a time when they knew less. And, if I can be really candid for a moment, honestly friends, I don't think there's ever been a time when we've cared less either.

Instead of being fishers of men, fulfilling the great commission and reaching out through areas of ministry as Andrew was explaining last week ... in our day and time, far too many churches have merely become keepers of the aquarium. There's something wrong ... there's something missing here ... and I want to suggest to you this morning that the 'something' is commitment.

We read a few minutes ago, in the passage from Luke chapter 5, that Peter, James and John were all fishermen ... they fished for a living. On this particular occasion, they'd been fishing all night and not caught a thing. They were tired, they were frustrated, and now, they wanted to hang up their nets for the day. There was no point going out to fish again at this stage. The sun was too hot and they knew the fish would be sheltering in deep waters, where no net was ever going to reach them. So Peter, James and John had brought their boats ashore, and begun to wash, dry and repair their nets. It was a long and tedious job, but it had to be done at the end of every fishing trip, so that all their equipment was ready for the next time.

Then along comes Jesus. He was preaching. In fact, He was so good at preaching that a large crowd had gathered to hear Him, and they were swarming around as He approached the lake. We're told that Jesus saw two boats at the edge of the water. He gets into the one belonging

to Peter, and asks him to put out into the water, a short distance offshore, so that He can use the boat as a place to teach, a kind of floating pulpit if you will. If you were to read this story without knowing any of the background, I suppose it might seem a bit presumptuous to just commandeer a boat like that, but Jesus isn't a stranger to Peter or indeed any of the others. In John's gospel we're told that Peter's brother Andrew: **"... found his brother Simon and told him, "We have found the Messiah" (that is, the Christ). And he brought him to Jesus. Jesus looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You will be called Cephas" (which, when translated, is Peter).** John 1:40-42

So, Peter already knew Jesus. He'd been personally introduced. From the day that Peter first met Him, I think he'd developed a liking for this new Rabbi. I suspect that he'd sometimes slip away to hear Him preach. It was a pleasant diversion away from the grind of his everyday life as the owner of a fishing business, and he always felt better after listening to Jesus. You could perhaps say that Peter had become a member of the 'Jesus fan club.' But that's pretty much all Peter was up until that point. He was just a member. He was a pew sitter. He went along from time to time, he quietly listened to the sermon, and then he'd go home. Jesus was a pleasant diversion, but Jesus was not the focus of Peter's life – fishing was!

But now ... here's Jesus and He's preaching again, and today, He appears to need Peter's help. Peter thinks to himself, "Well, sure ... I like you ... I've heard what you have to say, and you seem a really genuine kind of guy. You need a boat, I've got a boat, and the boat isn't being used for anything else, so ... yes, I'd love to help." Next thing you know, Peter has stopped what he's doing, and he puts the boat out a short distance away from the shore, just as Jesus has asked. For the next hour or two, he enjoys a front row seat, and he sits there listening to some of the finest preaching that anyone has ever heard. Sounds all right to me!

It's not especially important, and it doesn't affect our understanding of the rest of this story, but just an aside here ... most people assume that Peter remained in the boat with Jesus, while he listened to him preach. Personally, I don't think that's right. There's nothing in the verses immediately before this, to suggest that Peter had finished cleaning his nets by the time Jesus turns up, in fact the passage suggests that he was still in the middle of doing this. So I think, after he's pushed the boat further out into the lake and dropped the anchor, Peter jumps over the side, wades back to the shore, sits down with the rest of his crew and continues to sort out the nets while he's listening. Can you picture the scene ... Jesus sat in the boat, Peter on the beach with the rest of his crew, and the crowd stood in the background?

Well eventually, Jesus finishes preaching, the sermon is over, the crowd begins to disperse and Peter is ready to call it a day, but Jesus certainly isn't. Verse 4 says, **"When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch."** Now let's be clear about this friends ... Peter is a professional fisherman, and Peter knows two things:

- 1) This is the wrong time of day to be fishing
- 2) This is the wrong part of the lake to be fishing in

If you listen carefully, you can actually hear Peter thinking at this point: "I've just cleaned the nets. If I throw them into the water, I'll have to bring them back to shore and do that all over again. I really like you Jesus, and I think you're a great preacher ... but you're no fisherman." And so Peter tries to reason with Jesus. If you listen carefully, you can hear the frustration in his voice too: **"Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything"** (long pause). You can see him looking hopefully at Jesus, expecting Jesus to say, "Oh, okay, I just thought it may be worth a try ... but really Peter, you know fishing far better than I do. If you don't think that's a good idea ... well, don't worry about it."

But Jesus doesn't say anything. He just looks at Peter. And Peter looks back at him. You can imagine some of the crew, sat on the beach observing the 'stand off' at this point, and starting to wonder to themselves, "Is this guy for real? He wants to go fishing? Now? What's going on?" But then, almost without warning, without even turning around, Peter says to them, "Get back in the boat." Stunned, and probably still a bit unsure what to make of all this, they scoop

up the nets and wade into the water after Peter, they get to the boat and then they clamber onboard. Suddenly, this has turned into a story about a carpenter who commandeers a boat, preaches a sermon, and then tells the fishermen where the fish are.

They take the boat out into deep water, just as Jesus has asked, knowing full well that this is the last place anyone would ever go fishing, because of the type of nets that they were using. Their nets wouldn't reach far enough into deep water to catch anything ... nobody really knows why they're even trying, "**But,**" Peter says to Jesus, "**because you say so, I will let down the nets.**" (Luke 5:5) So he does, and a short time later, with the same shrug of resignation, he begins to draw them back in. Suddenly, the water begins to teem with fish.

Now let's be clear about this friends ... nothing like this has ever happened before. Peter and his crew have caught plenty of fish in their time, but this kind of catch was completely unheard of. Peter isn't just shocked; he's terrified. He falls down at Jesus' knees, saying, "**Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!**" (Luke 5:8) We're not told how the rest of them felt, but I think it's fair to say that everyone else onboard was pretty gobsmacked too.

The bible says that they caught such a large number of fish, Peter filled two nets to breaking point, then two boats to sinking point. But if you thought that was the miracle, you've missed the punchline here. The real miracle, is that in the middle of all this, Peter, James and John have all been converted to a living faith in Jesus Christ. The incontrovertible, outward proof of this is that as soon as they return to shore, they leave everything behind ... **everything behind** ... and follow Him. All three of them lay down their lives in all-out commitment. That friends, is the real point of this story.

Jesus challenged the disciples to leave their livelihood, but so many Christians nowadays aren't even willing to sacrifice their overtime. We go to our clubs, we play sports, we visit the gym, we see friends, we work in the garden and we spend countless hours in front of our TV and computer screens ... the list goes on. How can we read this account of three fishermen leaving everything behind with such indifference? I certainly can't.

Over the last few weeks, we've been hearing about some of the changes that are being made to the structure of OCF, including the introduction of membership. Moving forward, OCF is going to be adopting four core values ... C-O-R-E ... the first of which is commitment. Over the next few weeks, there will be other people getting up here to speak about the rest of them, but this morning, I want to spend the last few minutes to briefly look at the first one.

[Refer to separate page summarising CORE values relating to commitment, copy overleaf]

Closing Prayer

Father, we thank you for the challenge this morning of being fishers of men. Help us not to be merely keepers of an aquarium.

Will you take the lessons we've learned today, and the lessons that are still to come as we look at the remaining C-O-R-E elements over the next few weeks, to help us, equip us, empower us and inspire us, so that we might become more effective in reaching out to others, and building your kingdom in this place.

We ask it for the glory of your name. Amen.

Examples of Commitment (CORE Value) ... illustrated from Luke 5 : 1-11

- Doing whatever the church needs, to do what it does
EXAMPLE: mundane jobs, washing nets, getting hands dirty, working behind the scenes
- Working together - we are all volunteers (nobody is a paid member of staff)
EXAMPLE: boat owner, brothers, skipper, crew ... all worked together as a team
- Providing mutual support and accountability
EXAMPLE: the sea (and fishing in it) could be dangerous ... they had each others backs
- Treating church with importance - not as a hobby or just another club
EXAMPLE: this was their actual job, fishing (for men) should be our job ... God is the boss!
- Celebrating and using our own gifts
EXAMPLE: each person on the boat had different skills / experience to bring to the team
- Demonstrating that we matter to each other – it matters if people do not turn up
EXAMPLE: boat can't sail without full crew, needed all the help they could get to haul in nets
- Giving our time and resources (talents, money) to the work of the Kingdom
EXAMPLE: boat provided for Jesus to preach from, then another boat to help land the catch
- Holding to the vision / values of OCF – living lives that honour God and fulfil His calling
EXAMPLE: thought their future was fishing, but gave up everything to follow Jesus / His call