

WALKING WITH JESUS – INVITATION

(Luke 5.1-11)

Introduction

15 years ago, a friend of mine called Marc was Deputy Director of Acquisitions and Mergers at the huge international bank JP Morgan in London. And it's while he lived in London that he signed up for an Alpha Course. It changed his life.

After a few years, he left his smart executive job to become the Director of the Alpha Course in France. His colleagues thought he had lost his mind. To leave a brilliant career in high finance to go and build up a Christian ministry in the land of Jean-Paul Sartre, where the Catholic Church is in alarming decline – it's career suicide!

But God blessed that step of faith. Under Marc's leadership, in the first 6 years, the number of Alpha courses in France went from under 30 to over 400, in every area of the country.

Marc had to work really hard and make himself sacrificially available, taking no salary or even expenses, travelling the length and breadth of the land. That's quite an adventure when you have three young children and a mortgage to pay.

But Marc, like many people before him, heard the voice of the Lord say to him, "Follow me!" And he stood up to follow Jesus without looking in the rear-view mirror.

In our Gospel reading today, Jesus chooses the first of his 12 disciples. I think it's here that he decides who he's going to invest the *most* time with of all the twelve; Simon Peter.

Do you think Jesus chose his disciples carelessly or impulsively? I don't think so. He didn't just round up a few blokes in the street who looked like they needed a bit of physical exercise. Nor, incidentally, did he hire the three top students from Nazareth Bible College.

Jesus doesn't ask for volunteers and just hope for the best. He is a head-hunter.

None of the three in our reading has any pastoral experience at all. They are untrained, unqualified and inexperienced. They are total novices. But Peter (especially) has five qualities that set him apart from the rest.

What then are the key qualities that God is looking for in those he will decide to invest in?

1) Are you action-oriented?

Firstly, Jesus is looking for people who are oriented for action. He is not going to build anything with passive people.

Picture the scene. Jesus is speaking in the open air. The more he speaks, the more people come to listen. The little crowd becomes a big crowd and then, because Jesus is by the lakeside, and people are pushing him closer to the edge, Jesus ends up in the water with waves lapping around his ankles.

So he gets into a boat and says to Simon Peter (v3) "Could you just push me out a bit away from the shore?"

Why did he do that? It was probably easier for him to push it out himself and jump in because Simon was busy washing his nets on the shore; getting all the seaweed off and scrubbing them clean. He was hard at work. I would have left him be, but not Jesus!

Jesus doesn't hesitate to disturb him because he wants to see if Simon is active or passive. Is he inclined to action or to idleness? Seeing the problem, Simon puts his net down, jumps to his feet and sorts the problem out.

He could have said, "Listen, can't you see I'm busy?" He could have said, "Your crowd control thing is not my problem!" He could have said, "Why don't you just cut your sermon short, then they'll go away." No. Simon is a man of action, of initiative. He's a practical guy. As soon as he sees a problem everything inside him wants to sort it out.

I honestly think that if he had just carried on scrubbing seaweed off his nets that day and said to Jesus, "Get lost, I'm busy!" we'd never have heard about him again.

Are you wired for action? Do you get up on your feet and say "Let me help, what can I do to get this job done?" Or are you content to be a spectator?

2) Are you able to follow a leader?

The second quality Jesus is looking for comes in v4-5. "When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, 'Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.'

After Jesus finishes his address, he asks Simon and his two companions to jump in, row out into deeper water and put down their nets that they have just finished washing.

In v5 it says that they have just spent a completely unproductive night fishing. "Simon says, 'Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything...'"

As experienced fishermen they *know* that the best time to fish is at night because it is quieter then and the fish are unable to see the nets in the dark. They know that. And now, this young carpenter-turned-preacher, who probably knows *nothing* about fishing, has the temerity to suggest that they put the nets down again in broad daylight.

I would have said, "Why don't you just stick to your job, and I'll stick to mine?" I would have found Jesus' suggestion irritating, frankly.

But what does he say? "*Because YOU say so, oh alright, I will let down the nets,*" says Simon in v5. That is an amazing reply. I am sure that Simon doesn't *want* to do it.

What do you imagine is going on in his mind as he starts rowing? "Why did I agree to do this? I should be going home to bed now. People are watching this, hoping I will make an idiot of myself. And I am not going to disappoint them. This is insane. What am I *doing*?"

Now here's the thing: many people are oriented for action; high energy people who get things done. But when it comes to following instructions, they are impossible.

Jesus knows what he is doing. He keeps mavericks and free spirits *out* of his inner circle. He is looking for people who are obedient and teachable.

And Peter passes the test. "Because you say so, I will let do it." You will never reach your full potential in God if you cannot follow a leader.

3) Do you see yourself right?

The third quality that Jesus looks for - and finds - in Simon Peter is a true evaluation of self. Verse 6: "When they [let down the nets], they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. So they signalled to 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."

It would have been easy for Simon Peter to milk the situation. "Look at this everybody! You have just witnessed a *record catch* from the most prolific fisherman Galilee has ever seen!"

But Simon does not talk like that because he has a right evaluation of himself. He gives the glory where the glory is due. In v8 he throws himself at Jesus' feet and says, "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!"

4) Can you see God's greater plan?

But there's a fourth quality too.

And here it is: Jesus notices that Peter is able to see something bigger and greater. He sees God's greater plan. Yes, it is fantastic to catch fish, and it's even better if the catch is big. There were so many fish that (v7 says) not one but *two* boats *were in danger of sinking*.

What is Jesus really saying when he talks about fishing for people in v10? There's Peter, James and John with two boats overflowing with fish flapping about.

I think Jesus is saying, "Look Peter! I've got bigger fish to fry. There's more than this if you really want it. I'm thinking about *people* Peter! Do you want to spend your life

catching these slimy little tiddlers? Or do you see, by faith, hundreds of human lives, transformed by God? Peter! If you think this is good, you haven't seen *anything* yet."

Do you want your life to be about something grand scale for God or are you content to stay in your comfort zone?

Peter sees further. As soon as he catches the vision of human lives changed forever by the power of Christ, fish hold no more interest for him.

Is the harvest of souls in our land a passion Jesus sees in you? If it is, you'll pass the final test in v11.

5) Can you leave it all behind?

Here it is: Peter is ready and willing to leave it all behind. Verse 11: "So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him."

They leave their boats, their nets, their fish... (did they tip them all back into the sea? It doesn't say). But they abandon *everything* to follow Jesus.

They leave their work, their livelihood, their homes, and their security. Of course, if every Christian was called to leave their employment there'd be no Christians left in the world, but for these three (and for my friend Marc who I mentioned earlier) that's what it cost.

Is there anything that's stopping you following Jesus where he's leading you? If so, whatever it is, leave it behind.

Ending

Jesus is looking for men and women who get stuck in, who say without hesitation, "Since it's you who is asking Lord, OK, I'll do it," who don't have an inflated view of themselves, who can see God's bigger picture, and who are prepared to say "no" to anything that comes before walking with him. That's the invitation he extends to all of us today. "Follow me!"