

Sermon Epiphany 3

Matthew 4:13-23

May I speak in the name of God who is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Amen.

My dad was a fisherman, I am not sure he was ever very good at it though, I remember many stories when I was growing up of the big one that got away! I also remember my dad teaching my brother about fishing, he would spend hours showing my brother all the skills he had learnt from his dad. He also tried to share his knowledge with me but I used to run away screaming at the first sight of the bait. But eventually with love, care and persistence my dad did teach me a little about fishing, I even managed to catch a fish myself once!

The kind of fishing pictured in our gospel reading however, was not line-fishing, but net-fishing. When Jesus saw the two brothers they were casting their nets into the Sea of Galilee. Of course the ancient world would have known of line-fishing as well, but that was not what was envisioned by Jesus in the imagery of 'fishing for men'.

Simon Peter and Andrew would have worked hard, it would have taken the commitment of long hours and they would not always have seen good results, it was labour intensive.

Jesus said to them 'follow me and I will make you fish for people'

He could not have chosen a better metaphor to help his first disciples understand what their job was: to fish for people *and* to catch people for Jesus Christ. The fishermen understood what he meant by that.

Jesus of course was talking about what the church would label evangelism.

Now evangelism is a word that sends shivers down the spine of many a good Christian. For some people it conjures up visions of going door to door or awkwardly interjecting Jesus into every conversation. All of those things *are* scary, I agree. So, maybe it's time to stop using the word, "evangelism." May be it is even time to stop talking about it altogether and to just get on with it.

A common misconception about evangelism is that it has to be fast, big and colourful. It might be but that is not the only way. We are all different, created in the image of God, but all different. The *heart* of evangelism is sharing our lives with others, sharing our faith and introducing people to Jesus. Each of us will have different experiences and stories about how we were introduced to Jesus.

I wonder if you can remember who it was who introduced you to Jesus?

And *more importantly* what was it that caught your attention?

A few months ago I went on a training course, at the very beginning of the course we were asked – 'What *excites* you about the good news'?

It's a hard question to answer and one I have reflected on since. But I think it is the very place we should start when we want to *stop talking about evangelism* and get on with it. If we don't know what excites us about our faith, if we don't know what is *good* about the 'good news', then how are we to share that experience with others? We cannot be an effective evangelist unless we have been caught by Jesus, we cannot be effective evangelists unless we have experienced Jesus for ourselves. We need to speak to people out of *our personal experience*, yes that will involve stepping out of our comfort zones, but we do not need any fancy words, we do not need to be an expert, we just need to be honest and genuine about the 'good news' that *excites* us.

If as a church we *do not* take seriously the call of Jesus to follow him and fish for people then all of our hard work will be wasted, there will be little point in having lovely buildings if we do not fish for people, *and* it is *all of our responsibility*, not just a job for the Rector or the Curates, or the church wardens and the PCC but the responsibility of *all Christians*, each and every one of us.

We have much to be excited about here at St Faiths, we have *many* opportunities to invite people to come and see.

Jesus said follow me and I will make for fish for people. So I think the very best place for us to start is with Jesus. We *must* start to pray *intentionally* for growth, we must pray that we might be drawn to those people who need to hear what excites us about Jesus and pray that Jesus would give us the words and opportunities to cast our nets wide here in Havant.

We need to develop a culture of invitation, invitation is *personal* it helps us to build relationships and opens up the opportunity for conversation. Inviting people gives us the opportunity for them to come and see. Invite them to social events, to coffee mornings, and then invite them to see more, *invite them to worship!*

If each of us commits to these small steps I am certain that with the help of God we will see growth here at St Faiths.

Jesus didn't *just* say 'follow me' he said to those first disciples 'follow me and I will make you fish for people'.

Of course it might be that people run away just as I ran away from the fishing bait when I was a child, but net fishing is labour intensive, it takes time and commitment to see the results, but if we don't start somewhere we will never catch any fish.

Amen.