

Fishing for People!

How did *you* become a follower of Jesus Christ?

- I guess many will say, “My parents (or perhaps, my Mum!) used to go to church and I was sent to Sunday School. Later I was confirmed, and it went on from there.” That was *my own* case – with a few ups and downs!
- Some have different stories – I know one of our church members, whose parents were non-believers, came to faith as a student. Probably others have come into the church with the baptism of their children.
- I have read this week of a Turk brought up in a half-atheist, half-Muslim family. Through a grandfather he became a secret Muslim, but hearing Islam’s condemnation and curses of Christianity as a false religion, he was perversely curious to find out more about it. What he found out drew him very much. Now he’s given his life to our Lord and is awaiting baptism.
- This week’s Church Times tells of Katie Piper, the Songs of Praise presenter (better known perhaps from TV adverts for Pantene shampoo!). She had sulphuric acid thrown in her face by a jilted lover and was horribly acid-burnt. She came from a non-church family. When in hospital, it was the prayers of a nurse for her that first touched her spiritually. After leaving hospital she began to attend a church.

Our Gospel today tells of the *first* Christian disciples.

Jesus, following his baptism by John and his 40-day temptation in the Judean wilderness, came into Galilee announcing, “The time is fulfilled; the kingdom of God is upon you. Repent and believe this good news” (Mk.1:15). The Greek word *basileia*, rendered here ‘kingdom’ is better translated ‘rule’ or ‘reign’. The people of Israel had long been awaiting this reign. Isaiah 52:7 -

How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of the messenger who announces peace, who brings good news, who announces salvation, who says to Zion, ‘Your God reigns.’

After making his momentous announcement, Jesus set about gathering a band of followers. As he walked along the shore of the lake of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a hand-net into the water, and said to them, “Follow me, and I will make you fish for people!” Going on a little further, he saw James and John in a boat with their father Zebedee, mending their trawl net. He called them too. In each case the brothers immediately left their work and followed him. If this were their first encounter with Jesus we would think it extraordinary behaviour or, as a commentator says, ‘inexplicable and irresponsible’. But from the first chapter of John’s Gospel (1:35-42) we hear Andrew had been a disciple of John the Baptist, who had pointed him to Jesus with the words, “Look, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (1:29). After spending time with Jesus, he brought his brother to him with the words, “We have found the Messiah.” Luke tells us that James and John were their business partners (Lk. 5:10). Surely they quickly shared with them about Jesus, so all were ready to respond to his call when it came.

What task were they given? **‘Fishing for people’!** As D.E. Nineham says, ‘drawing (people) out of the waters of this world into the net of the... life of the age to come.’ Or more simply, *winning converts*. Now Mark wrote his gospel for Christian

disciples and, in this simple account of Jesus' call of the two pairs of brothers, he appears to be setting them before us as *role models*:

- As they responded immediately to Jesus' call, so unconditional commitment is required from us.
- As they were called to 'fish for people', that is to be our task too.

In 1984 the Anglican Consultative Council drew up for the Anglican Communion 'Four Marks of Mission', adding in 1990 a fifth:

'To strive to safeguard the integrity of creation, and sustain and renew the life of the earth.'

At this moment, as we know well, the international Cop 26 conference is meeting in Glasgow, aiming to reduce the emission of harmful gases and to take other important steps to try to keep global warming to 1.5 degrees. The Church is fully in support:

- Archbishop Welby is attending the conference.
- Our own bishop has led our diocese to be the first in the UK to commit to reach net zero carbon emission by 2030.
- In this parish we have an active environment committee.
- And personally, many of us are considering how soon we should trade in our petrol cars for electric ones.

So, we are doing a great deal just now to put into practice the 5th mark of mission. But we must not so emphasise it that we neglect to practice the other marks. What is Mark 1?

'To Proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom'! - TO BE FISHERS OF PEOPLE

That is to invite people, through our Lord Jesus Christ, to submit their lives to the rule of our loving Heavenly Father.

What are we doing to put this into practice? English Anglicans are *notoriously bad about sharing out faith*. We cringe! We recoil! And so the Church of England continually shrinks in numbers. One of the provocative things my clerical father used to say in his ministry was: **Evangelise or die!** And he was right.

What then *can we do*? I suggest just a few points:

1. Think out clearly what makes *us believe*. What are the reasons that we are Christians? Write them down. Be prepared to share this testimony at the appropriate time in no more than 3 minutes.
2. Get some copies of individual gospels in modern English. As opportunity arises, ask someone who doesn't attend church if they have ever read one of the gospels in the Bible right through. Offer them one and ask that, as they read it through, to reflect on two questions: Who is this Jesus? What is the implication for me? I know of someone in Stoke Bishop, when I was Curate there, who day by day read the Gospel of Mark through with his wife on her deathbed. The outcome was they both came to faith, and he was helped through that painful bereavement.
3. For a brief summary of the Christian Gospel and how to commit one's life to Christ I can recommend *The Four Spiritual Laws* devised by Bill Bright, now some 50 years ago! The four laws or principles, illustrated by little diagrams, are:

1. God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.
2. Man is sinful and separated from God. Therefore he cannot know and experience God's love and plan for his life.
3. Jesus Christ is God's *only* provision for man's sin. Through him you can know and experience God's love and plan for your life.
4. We must individually receive Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord; then we can know and experience God's love and plan for our lives.

Then there is a short prayer one can use, and a list of 6 suggestions for Christian growth.

A **parish** too needs a strategy for evangelism. That's up to its Vicar and PCC. In my own parish in the Decade of Evangelism (1990-2000) we had a variety of events including, in 1997, a week-long mission with a varied programme, and in later years we began to use the Alpha course. Others use the longer Emmaus or other discipleship courses. What strategy will St. Peter's develop to promote the first mark of mission?

In closing let us reaffirm our commitment by saying together two verses of the hymn 'Take my life' by Frances R. Havergal:

Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to thee;
Take my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Take my will, and make it thine:
It shall be no longer mine.
Take my heart: it is thine own;
It shall be thy royal throne.

Andrew Daunton-Fear

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