

1 Corinthians 15:1-11**Luke 5:1-11****Introduction**

As many of you know I have a new cat, a beautiful ginger boy called Erik. Unfortunately Erik has had a tough life and as a result is incredibly nervous and anxious. Up until these past few weeks whenever anyone else is in the house Erik hides. He gradually got to trust my best friend, who comes to see me often, and had begun to come down and sit on my lap while we share a glass of wine – but any movement or noise and Erik is off. The last time my friend came something amazing happened while leaning over very gently to pass me something Erik took the movement as an invitation, put aside his fears, jumped onto the other footstool and allowed himself to be stroked.

That was one of those defining moments. When you can look back and say; “That’s when it all changed!” Something new has begun. Our Gospel story today tells of one of those defining moments when life was transformed for Simon and his friends James and John. He and the other fishermen had been working all night. They had been out on the lake fishing and were now back on shore washing their nets. We are told that they had worked hard all night and hadn’t caught anything.

Their boats were on the shore, probably in one of the little inlets of the lake and Jesus came by and began to teach the people who were following him. The crowd was large and it had clearly become difficult for everyone to see or hear Jesus. So Jesus got into one of the boats and asked its owner, Simon to put out from shore. This worked really well because with the shape of the inlet there was a natural amphitheatre where the crowd could stand and Jesus some yards out would be able to be heard easily by everyone gathered there.

When he had finished speaking he told Simon to put out into the deeper water of the lake and let down the nets. Now from Simon’s point of view it was completely bonkers and against all his knowledge and experience. The best time to fish on the lake is a night. They had fished all night where Jesus was asking them to go and had caught nothing. Daylight was not the time to try again. Here we have a strange situation where a fisherman is being told how to carry out his work by a carpenter. The fisherman objects. But says, ‘Because you say so, I will let down the nets.’ This was the defining moment of Simon’s life. It was also a defining moment in Jesus’ ministry.

Up until then Jesus had been travelling around the countryside and town teaching the people who came out to see him. He now called some of those people to follow him; to come and learn from him and to become evangelists as well. He was going to make them ‘fishers of men’ , people

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who would tell others the good news about Jesus and help them to come to faith in him.

This was a new phase in Jesus' ministry. He had begun to surround himself with people who believed in him and who were willing to trust him to the point of obeying him in matters that didn't make sense. From now on he would concentrate on teaching these men who he was and what he had come to earth to achieve.

For Peter this encounter was completely transformative. He had met someone who attracted him. Who he was able to obey even though his command appeared to be nonsensical and suddenly his life was transformed. He had unwillingly obeyed and the result was way beyond any expectations – enough fish to sink the boat and meant he needed to call for help. He realised that there was something powerful and holy about this person he had encountered. He fell at Jesus' feet and said, Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man. He recognized his own sinfulness and need – and yet Jesus then said something astonishing, "Don't be afraid; from now on you will fish for people". Jesus was calling him to a completely new way of life. Something totally beyond his experience and yet his response was immediate and complete. If this man was not worth following – who was? We are told, "So they pulled up their boats on shore, left everything and followed him."

Simon and his friends had been asked by Jesus to do something crazy. All their experience and knowledge told them it was a pointless exercise. Nobody could have blamed them if they had told Jesus to mind his own business and let them do the fishing. But they obeyed – albeit in a slightly grudging manner. And the result was absolutely transformative. This event changed Simon's life forever. He had met Jesus, seen his power and been given a new role in life, a new job.

Which leads me to ask, "Just think what he would have missed out on if he hadn't taken that leap of faith and obeyed Jesus".

I am reminded of a time in the mid-nineties when I was vicar of a small Victorian church. A young woman had come to see me because she had had several ectopic pregnancies and being in a new marriage desperately wanted reassurance that she would have more children. In the course of our conversations she came to faith in Jesus and her husband followed her to faith. The family began to worship with us and we were preparing them for confirmation.

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One summer evening her husband phoned me in deep distress. She had been feeling unwell and gone to see the doctor thinking she had a urinary tract infection and he had diagnosed an early ectopic pregnancy. The doctor had taken a blood sample to send off to confirm the diagnosis and arranged for her to go to Hammersmith Hospital for a new and very advanced scan that would be able to detect this still very new pregnancy.

They asked me to come round and pray with them. The wife was lying on her bed resting and as we prayed together I very clearly heard God's voice say to me, "Angela, lay your hands on her tummy and ask me to move the embryo back into the womb". That was the beginning of a fierce argument in my head. "Are you mad? Lord" I replied. "If that doesn't happen they will lose their faith". "Trust me" came the reply. "Lay your hands on her and ask me to move the baby."

So eventually, with fear and trembling I asked if they would mind if I laid my hands on her tummy. She placed her hands on her stomach and I laid mine on top and out loud asked God to move the embryo into the mother's womb. As we prayed she felt a warmth moving across her stomach and both she and her husband became much calmer.

I went home anxiously wondering what on earth I had done. What a crazy way to pray – even if I had thought I had heard God telling me to do it. It was bonkers!

The next day one of my colleagues drove the couple to Hammersmith hospital where she had the scan which showed – the embryo firmly implanted in the mother's womb! There was much rejoicing and their faith was strengthened. A week later their GP contacted them with the results of the blood test he had taken. The hormone levels showed very clearly that the embryo had been planted in the wrong place! It was a miracle! – and that miracle is now 22 and called Timothy.

Afterwards, when reflecting on this experience I wondered why God had chosen to do that for them using me – when so many other desperate prayers aren't answered miraculously. I decided that for them, because before they came to faith in Jesus, they had been involved in the occult, they needed to know beyond doubt that God was more powerful than any other force and he was able to take care of them. Their faith has remained strong through the years – even in difficult times.

But the question still remains what would all three of us (and their family) missed out on if I had not obeyed God's strange instruction and prayed the way I did.

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Life with Jesus is about obedience and trust. He gave himself completely for us and he calls us to follow him; not always as dramatically as he called Simon or that married couple, but he does want us to trust him and to go where he leads – if we do that who knows what might happen?