

EETM (St Serf's)
10 February 2019
Luke 5: 1-11

It must have been one of those jaw-dropping, mind-blowing moments for the disciples. Ordinary men, doing the extraordinary job that is fishing, having a bad time of it, ready to pack it in for the night and get some well-earned rest. They're tired, cold and fed up. Then along comes this guy, who they've vaguely heard of – apparently, he's doing some pretty amazing things roundabout and asks them to take him out a little way so he can teach the crowd. Then, he starts telling them how to do their job. Although they protest a bit at first, eventually, just to humour him, really, they wearily get the boat back out into the deep water and let down the nets to have another go. Suddenly, the nets are full of fish, bursting at the seams and threatening to swamp the boat. Frantically, they signal to their mates on the

shore to come and help and somehow they manage to get the catch ashore.

It's a fantastic story. More importantly, though, it tells us absolute truth about who we are and what it means to be a church and to be disciples. I think our church today isn't that dissimilar from how the fishermen are in this story. Listen to what they say: “We have fished all night and caught nothing”. Sounds an awful lot like, “We've already tried all of that and none of it works. We're tired trying to attract new people into the church – we've been at it for years”.

Now look at what Jesus does. First of all, he gets in the boat with the disciples. Whatever it is that he's going to ask the disciples to do, he's going to do it with them. He is in the boat with the disciples, so whatever happens to them, good or bad, happens to

him too. So it is with us. Jesus is in the boat, in our church, part of the project, part indeed of the Team— along with us. Whatever happens to us, happens to Jesus. What a comfort, to realise that, whatever happens, we don't do this on our own. Jesus is right there alongside us. Look at what happens now. Jesus asks the disciples to put out into deep water, into uncharted territory, into danger. He asks them to take a risk for him. Who knows what is lurking in the depths. Drowning is a real possibility. So it is with us. Jesus asks us to go out into uncharted waters; to quite literally get out of our depth; to start taking risks. If we are going to be disciples – if we are going to help build and grow the church – we need to get out of our depth, to get into deep water, to go to those unfamiliar places and do those unfamiliar things. We have to start taking risks.

In John's version of this story, Jesus asks the disciples to let the net down on the other side of the boat. In other words, he asks them to do things in a different way from before. Not only are they out in deep water, suddenly he wants them to fish differently from how they've ever fished before. Again, this applies to us. The old ways don't work. We are witnessing a steady, consistent decline in the numbers through the doors – and far more importantly, our message, our truth, is seen as utterly, utterly irrelevant in today's society. If we are to stand a chance of reversing that trend we must, we absolutely must, put the net on the other side of the boat, think outside the box, push the envelope, whatever jargon phrase you like, they all mean the same thing. We have to do things differently.

That doesn't just mean different styles of worship It means adopting a new approach to the whole of our church life. Just as

Jesus gets in the boat with the disciples, so we have to get in the boat and get alongside our communities. We need to think about how we can support and love the people here, without necessarily asking them to become members of the church. One initiative that is already in the planning stage is the use of St John's as a host for a toddler group. I'm sure there are many other ideas we can take forward together.

It is scary, launching off into the unknown – scary, disconcerting and not a little alarming. But we can be assured that, whatever happens, Jesus is in the boat alongside us and, wherever our journey leads, he will always be there with us, supporting us, teaching us, guiding us, loving us.

Amen.