

## **Bible Readings**

### **Isaiah 55:6-11**

<sup>6</sup> “Seek the Lord while he may be found;  
call upon him while he is near;  
<sup>7</sup> let the wicked forsake his way,  
and the unrighteous man his thoughts;  
let him return to the Lord, that he may have compassion on him,  
and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.  
<sup>8</sup> For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord.  
<sup>9</sup> For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts.  
<sup>10</sup> “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven  
and do not return there but water the earth,  
making it bring forth and sprout,  
giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater,  
<sup>11</sup> so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth;  
it shall not return to me empty,  
but it shall accomplish that which I purpose,  
and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it.

### **Luke 5:1-11**

5 On one occasion, while the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God, he was standing by the lake of Gennesaret, <sup>2</sup> and he saw two boats by the lake, but the fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. <sup>3</sup> Getting into one of the boats, which was Simon's, he asked him to put out a little from the land. And he sat down and taught the people from the boat. <sup>4</sup> And when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.” <sup>5</sup> And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” <sup>6</sup> And when they had done this, they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking. <sup>7</sup> They signaled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink. <sup>8</sup> But when Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.” <sup>9</sup> For he and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, <sup>10</sup> and so also were James and John, sons of Zebedee, who were partners with Simon. And Jesus said to Simon, “Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men.” <sup>11</sup> And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.

## Sermon

## **Vote of No Confidence**

Over the last two Sundays, we were with Jesus in the synagogue in Nazareth where He read the words of Isaiah and then preached. His life-giving words were received with amazement and wonder. However, amazement and wonder changed when His hearers, His fellow Jews, related what Jesus said to how they knew Him: as the son of the carpenter Joseph.

Receptiveness changed into rejection. Acting on their anger, all in the synagogue drove Jesus out with the intention to throw Him off the cliff and so to kill Him.

However,

*‘...passing through their midst, he went away.’ (Luke 4:30)*

In our New Testament reading of this morning, Jesus is standing by the lake. He is under pressure, for the crowds want Him to continue to preach. That pressure prompts Jesus to get into one of the two boats He sees. Not only that, Jesus asks Simon, to whom the boat belongs, to put the boat a bit out from the land. Then, the Rabbi of all rabbis sits down and teaches.

When Jesus finishes, He tells Simon to do something,

*Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.”<sup>5</sup> And Simon answered, “Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But at your word I will let down the nets.” (Luke 5:4,5)*

Since they had failed to catch any fish during the night, this does not seem to make any sense to Peter. However, Peter does neither insist on his logic nor on his expertise nor on his way. Instead, he lets all of that go. It is that letting go that creates room for receiving Jesus’s words. Having received them, Peter acts on them.

What happens then is mind blowing.

What is found in the nets, is an abundance of fish.

Now, here is an encouragement to us, to do the same as Peter: to let go insistence on our own ways, and go God’s way. But that requires willingness to get to know Him; willingness to learn to discern Him in His mysterious ways; willingness to let Him be who He is. And that is costly.

The words,

*For my thoughts are not your thoughts,  
neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. (Isaiah 55:8)*

set us within boundaries.

We could climb the highest mountain and reach the top, but heaven cannot be reached by human efforts. It has been tried. The story in which people thought they could build a tower that would reach heaven may be known to you: the story of the tower of Babel. God intervened. He dealt with the overconfidence; the arrogance that drove people to think they could ignore God. They overstepped His boundaries.

Therefore, God confused them by giving them different languages which prevented them from carrying on.

Later, in the story of Jacob, we see a reverse. When Jacob was running away from his angry brother Esau; when Jacob was all alone and scared of his unknown future, Jacob had a dream. In Jacob's dream, *God put a ladder from heaven on to earth*, with angels coming down, giving Jacob God's comfort and peace, and angels going up to, taking Jacob's fear and grief with them.

Already there, in the first book of the Bible, we meet God as He is: a God, who gives His Grace from above. Therefore, when Jacob wakes up, he is able to move on into an unknown future with strength, knowing that God is with Him.

Neither Jacob in the Old Testament nor Simon in our New Testament reading moved forward with his own strength and courage. The moving on could happen because of what was received from God.

Like Jacob and Simon, we too can move on, with strength given by the same gracious God.

But why does Peter say,

*Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord* (Luke 5:8)

What does that mean?

Well, the goodness of God as illustrated in the amount of fish that broke the nets...it was too much for Peter.

Peter always knew his own ways so well; he knew what he was capable of. He was a professional fisherman. Nobody needed to tell him how to do his job. But all that self-confidence was now turned upside down. Now he was shown what God can do.

*For as the heavens are higher than the earth,  
so are my ways higher than your ways  
and my thoughts than your thoughts. (Isaiah 55:9)*

The effect of the revelation of God's power on Peter was that he realised the contrast; the distance between him as a human being, and God.

That realisation made him fall down at Jesus's feet.

Peter learned that human existence is not anchored in human strength. It is anchored in God's gift of boundless grace. Despite the distance between God and human beings, God bends graciously towards them.

In Jesus, God came to them.

By falling at Jesus's feet while saying, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord,' Peter expressed his overwhelming realisation that standing in the light of God's grace also means that the dark places within him were brought to light, by that same light of grace.

The effect of God's light is twofold: it makes you stand in His grace, but at the same time, it works like an X-ray.

It holds a paradox. But precisely in what God's light brings to light, Jesus says,

*'Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching men'.* (Luke 5:10)

This is how Simon is called to follow Jesus. We are called to do the same. We can 'catch people's eye' by a way of life that reflects God's grace and compassion.

On Simon Peter, who trusted completely Jesus's words, God built His Church, the Church to which you and I belong.

Like Peter's, our existence is anchored in Grace.

*'When they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.'*  
(Luke 5:11)

Where does that leave us?

Do we have the same level of trust Simon had, when Jesus told him to put out into the deep and let down his nets for a catch?

Do we trust God, whose ways are higher than ours, whose thoughts are higher than ours?

In Nazareth, a clear vote of no confidence was given to Him who came from heaven to fulfil Isaiah's words. Such votes continue to be given to Him and manifest themselves in any thoughts, words and actions that are rooted in anger. But where Jesus is followed, there is no place for belittling, for taking revenge, for being dismissive.

Don't deprive yourself of the chance to get to know God better. Dare leave behind what you need to leave behind for His Name's sake. For only through knowing Him, you know that you are carried by Him, through any storm in life.

Amen.