

March 1st 2020 – St Andrew's [Lent I]

Message: Broken Nets

It must have been quite an ordinary morning on the lake;
gulls crying, waves murmuring,
boats knocking gently against one another.
Far from anywhere important,
out in the rural countryside.

Three fishermen, after a long and unsuccessful night's work,
washing their nets and getting ready to go home.
The morning calm is disrupted by the sounds of a crowd,
headed their way, hot on the heels of an ordinary-looking man.
When the man sees them,
he asks if they'll put out one of their boats
just off shore,
let him use it as a kind of
floating platform
to teach from.

Simon Peter agrees; and he sat in the boat, listening, as Jesus spoke to the crowd.
When his speech is over, though,
rather than putting back into shore,
Jesus came up with a strange idea.
"Let's go fishing out into the deep water.
I've got a hunch
there's a catch out there."

Simon, experienced fisherman that he was,
tried to be polite in his answer to this landlubber.
"You know, Master, we've been out the whole night,
and caught nothing."
He didn't add, but was probably thinking,
"He doesn't realize that no one goes
deep sea fishing in broad daylight
around here."

But Simon, having failed to accomplish much
by his own tried and true methods,
was in no position to question this strange suggestion.
What he does say is the sentence
that will change the entire course of his life:
"If you say so...we'll do it."

You know how the story goes from here.
Simon Peter let down his nets.
And as he drew them up, the nets,
empty all night, so full of fish now,
began to fray and break.

He yelled for his partners to come with the other boat to help haul in the catch,
and they filled both boats so full
that they began to sink.

Nets breaking,
boats full to overflowing,
Jesus – no ordinary man after all –
sitting in the stern,
and Simon Peter falls down at Jesus' knees,
in the midst of all those fish, and says,
“Depart from me,
for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”

Simon Peter is afraid.
He's not afraid of his boat sinking
or his nets breaking;
he's afraid because he has just figured out
that God is somehow working through this man Jesus
– only God, after all, has anything like
that kind of power over creation.

Simon's afraid because he is,
in some way,
on this very ordinary morning-turned-extraordinary,
in the presence of God.
And he knows himself to be unworthy,
inadequate, and he tells Jesus to go,
because he is too sinful
to deserve to be in Christ's presence.

But Jesus says,
“don't be afraid...
...from now on, you're going to be catching men!”

Simon's not wrong to be thinking he's inadequate, unworthy, and sinful.

Simon Peter does not seem like the sort of person
Jesus ought to be calling to fish
for a more complicated, challenging catch.
Anybody can have a bad day fishing...
...but you don't expect professional fisherman
to come up empty!

If you wanted to find somebody to become a "fisher of people,"
you might want at the very least
to choose somebody who had proven to be
a reasonably successful fisher of fish!

There was nothing particularly striking
about any of the people Jesus called to follow him.
Like the middle-of-nowhere small fishing village
in which Jesus chose to begin his ministry,
those first followers of his were ordinary folks.

And Simon Peter was not kidding
when he claimed to be a sinful man...
...this is the same Peter, after all,
who started a "who's the greatest disciple" conversation;
the same Peter who fell asleep
in the garden of Gethsemane,
who cuts someone's ear off with a sword,
who denies Jesus...
...and who, devastated
at his own weakness
and lost after Christ's death,
goes back to fishing.

Simon Peter was not a perfect man;
but maybe he didn't need to be.

As it began for Simon Peter on that ordinary morning on the lake,
after a disappointing night at work,
often it begins for us
when Jesus comes into the middle of our lives,
where we work,
where we live;
By the lakeside, in the classroom,
the hospital, the office,
the factory, the kitchen,
and asks us to trust him enough

to do one strange little thing,
like fishing in deep water in broad daylight.

It's the kind of thing that's a little different,
a bit outside your usual routine and what you normally like to do.
But that's often where Jesus' call comes to us:
where we least expect it.
Where we've failed.
Where we feel in over our heads.
Where we feel uncomfortable.
Where we sense our own futility,
our own inadequacy.

I wonder...how often do we let ourselves off the hook,
and hide behind our inadequacies and unworthiness;
how often we put off or avoid what God's calling us to do
because we're more comfortable
making excuses for *not* doing it?

We say, we're not good enough at being Christian to share Jesus' love;
we're not smart enough to witness to what that love means for us;
not young enough to do anything useful
or old enough to have enough familiarity and experience
to contribute;
not rich enough to have the spare time
to help out;
not poor or struggling enough
to have a good story to tell
about God's grace.

We get afraid, wherever we are in our lives or on our spiritual journeys,
that whoever we are in the world or in the church,
that we are not enough for Jesus.

When Simon Peter fell down at Jesus' feet,
in among the fish, and said,
"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man,"
when he recognized Jesus as somehow
bringing him into God's presence,
when he recognized himself as sinful,
as unworthy,
as not good enough
to be there
...Jesus...

did not disagree with him.

He did not tell Simon Peter that he's wrong about being sinful and unworthy.
But Jesus did tell him not to be afraid;
and he gives Simon a mission:
to "fish for people,"
to share Jesus' love,
and the good news of what that love means.
Yes, Simon Peter is sinful;
he is unworthy,
he is as imperfect a human being
as the rest of us.
But that doesn't mean he needs to be afraid.
And it doesn't mean that he can't help Jesus
change the world.

I expect most of you have, at some point, read or watched a fairy tale.
Although new Disney ones are being written all the time,
there are some classic stories,
loved by today's children just as much
as when they were first written.
And some kinds of stories appear again and again,
in different guises,
with different names
and different settings,
in cultures around the world.
Take the story of Cinderella, for example;
a tale of a young woman living in
oppressive, lonely, or hopeless circumstances
that are suddenly changed to remarkable good fortune
and abundant happiness.

That story, with a girl with a Greek name
and a sandal instead of a glass slipper,
is around 2000 years old;
it appears in Asia a little later,
and Europe, even later still.

Fairy tales are stories of reversals,
of transformations.
There is something we love about stories
where humble girls become princesses,

where frogs are handsome princes in disguise,
where ugly ducklings grow up
to be beautiful swans.

If we rounded up Jesus' first disciples
and brought them all together and lined them up...
...I bet we'd never in our wildest imaginations guess
Just by looking at them
that this ordinary group of people
could change the world.

But because of Jesus and their fearless commitment to him,
they did.
They planted churches,
and wrote bits of our Bible;
they got it wrong sometimes,
and other times, incredibly right;
they worked hard, travelled far,
and took risks.
Those ordinary, imperfect men
were enough for Jesus.

And we are, too. We are enough.
And there is no place too unimportant,
no moment too ordinary,
where the love and presence of Jesus would be wasted.

Our ordinary lives put us where Jesus needs us to be,
in the office, at the store,
in the kitchen, the classroom,
the hospital...
...ordinary, every-day places and moments
where Jesus' extraordinary grace,
his love and forgiveness are most needed.

There is a beautiful image of abundance,
tucked away in this story.
Those boats didn't just have some fish in them;
those nets weren't just full.
The boats were sinking under the weight
and the nets bursting under the strain
of all those fish.
Like Simon Peter,
we don't need to be afraid

that we are not enough for Jesus:
not enough for him to love,
not enough to live into that new, kingdom-life he offers us.
We are enough for Jesus
and Jesus is abundantly more than enough,
full to bursting,
for us.
Amen.