

A Sermon by Canon Maggie Guite

4 before Lent C February 10th 2019

Luke 5.1-11 Linton All Age Eucharist

Catching and being caught

Let's just think for a minute or two about all the catching that went on in the Gospel reading we've just heard (it's on the red top sheet, if you need to remind yourself). There was the obvious catching and non-catching: Jesus telling Simon to put out into deep water and let down his nets for a catch:

Simon's reply about not having caught anything in a whole night's work beforehand – but agreeing to give it another go, anyway, at Jesus' command.

And then the huge, huge catch of fish, so big that even with two boats to carry them in, the boats were overloaded and beginning to sink.

And then, Jesus' words – were they a promise or a command? – to Simon Peter, James and John p *'do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people.'*

So – those are the obvious bits about catching: but what about the other ways in which we sometimes use the word 'caught'? You could go back to the beginning of the story, and say that there was such a crowd trying to listen to Jesus, because his teaching had *'caught on'*. Or you could

put that another way – Jesus had *'hooked'* the people, not by some cheap attempt to find out what they *wanted*, and then offering to satisfy it, like a salesman – but at a deeper level: he knew what they *needed*, deep, deep down – and as they heard him, and saw him heal and speak with authority, they just couldn't help themselves – they had to follow him and look for more.

Then, what about the fishermen, washing their nets, at perhaps a little distance from the crowd: they *caught* Jesus' attention: he immediately saw how they could help him by lending a boat for him to speak out of, so his words would be magnified over the water, and more people could hear him without having to crowd together so tight.

And, of course, Jesus caught their attention, too, with his authoritative manner – so Simon did what he asked, readily lent him the boat, and then, with a little hesitation, even set out on a second fishing trip, when he must have already been bone weary.

Finally, when Simon and his fellow-fishermen witnessed – the totally unexpected catch of fish – something else caught Peter – a sense of *awe*; and of *fear*, too. Fear that this man who seemed to know everything, – from the deep mysteries of God, to where the shoals of fish were to be caught in the lake – this man, this figure of awesome authority and holiness, would *catch him out*, catch him in his sins and show him up....

I wonder if you've ever felt that?...a sense of God's presence coming near, and a fear of your own overwhelming unworthiness? I remember various

occasions when I felt a fear like Simon Peter's rather strongly: One of them when met a great teacher on prayer, a Russian Orthodox Archbishop called Anthony Bloom, who seemed to know so much about God and be so close to him, and who had such penetrating eyes, that I felt he must know all about me, and be aware of my secret sins. (You see, I had quit a lot on my conscience!) I wonder if you've ever felt awe at the presence and power of God in a person or a place, mixed with a fear that your sins might be exposed?

There's as saying in the book of Psalms which goes, '*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom*' (Psalm 111.10), so it's not a bad thing fear like this, but our Gospel story today tells us that the God into whose holy presence we come has the face of Jesus, he doesn't meet us with humiliation and exposure, but with wonderful mercy and love.

In my life, I wasn't '*caught out*' in some humiliating way, whatever that Archbishop could or couldn't tell about me, and our Gospel story shows us that Jesus didn't want to catch Simon Peter out either. He *did* know all about him - of course he did. He knew his weakness, he knew where he'd failed - and where he'd fail in the future. But he knew him with the eyes of restoring love, the kind of love which sees what someone can be and do *for* God and *with* God despite their feet of clay.. To put it another way, Jesus saw Peter with the eyes of *grace*.

And what he did in grace was to ask Simon Peter - and James and John, (and Andrew - though he didn't get a mention in today's Gospel passage) to catch other people

for God in the same way that Jesus was catching them. Extraordinarily, these everyday fishermen were to become channels of truth and wisdom - God's truth and wisdom - sharing a message which would answer people's deepest needs, even when people didn't know what these were for themselves. However unworthy, they were asked to start living and speaking with a share in Jesus' own holiness and authority - never forgetting their own sinfulness, but letting it drive them to deeper and deeper reliance on God and on grace.

And Jesus asks us to do this too. To catch people for him. And one final thought: Since we are asked to catch people for Christ, and yet are so far from perfect, we can't rely on our own goodness to be all the message people need. Very often, we like to tell ourselves that the example of our lives should be enough to draw people to Christ, without our having to do anything so challenging as *talking* about him. Well - we should try to bring our lives into consistency with our message, of course - but often we'll fail. That's life. So words *are* necessary, too. And it's in our words that we can make clear that our message isn't at all about our own goodness. It's about the goodness of God, the one who sees everyone with the eyes of restoring love, the eyes of grace.