

Walk with Jesus: Jesus First

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[0 : 00] Let's share our prayer together. Heavenly Father, we humbly bow in your presence. May your word be our rule, your spirit our teacher, and your great glory our supreme concern.

We heard the saying, a leader with no one following is just someone taking a walk. You might know the direction and the way to go, but if you are to be a leader, you need others to follow, to go with you.

Luke's gospel started off in chapters 1 and 2 with the Christmas story, which we've been thinking about over the past few weeks.

Then in chapter 3, we read of John the Baptist and the baptism and the genealogy of Jesus. And then in chapter 4, Jesus, empowered by the Spirit, is tempted in the wilderness and preaches his first sermon at Nazareth.

Up to the end of chapter 4, Jesus has been born, his ministry has started. Jesus is at work preaching the good news and displaying the power of God.

[1 : 34] But up to the end of chapter 4, it's Jesus on his own. It really is only Jesus doing things.

Beginning in chapter 5, Luke introduces the followers, the disciples of Jesus. Those who will become the church.

Peter, James and John and all the followers in the gospel story are disciples of Jesus. We, all of us, are disciples of Jesus.

There is by design a deep connection and similarity between the first disciples and every other disciple.

Yes, they didn't have smartphones. We won't go fishing in the Lake of Galilee this afternoon. But by being disciples of Jesus, we have a great deal in common.

[2 : 39] We are to learn from them. What it means for us to follow Jesus. And today, we begin walking with Jesus.

We are to learn that Jesus goes first. Jesus is the leader. We are the followers. We follow him. The story Fiona read for us earlier in Luke 5 is perhaps one of the more familiar gospel stories.

I'm sure if you were given a prompt. Remember that story about Peter and the boat and the fish? You could probably remember all the details. There's a large crowd pressing round Jesus so they might hear the word of God from him.

Jesus picks out Peter's boat. He gets in it and says to Peter, Put out just a little bit from the shore so I can sit down in the boat and teach the crowd and they won't all be pressing round about me.

When he finishes his teaching, Jesus says to Peter, Put out into the deep water and let down your fishing nets to catch some fish. Peter, the professional fisherman, questions whether this is a good idea.

[4 : 03] They've been out all night and they've caught nothing. But although Peter doubts, he obeys. And they take a huge and valuable catch of fish which fills Peter's boat and the boats of his partners in the fishing business.

Luke especially mentions the size of the catch. He wants to emphasise the power at work behind this unexpected catch of fish.

Peter then responds to Jesus by falling on his knees in worship. Peter speaks words of humility and confession in the presence of the great holiness of God.

Jesus then uses the catch of fish to teach Peter something about the path of discipleship. And what it will mean for him to follow Jesus.

As I said, the outline of the story is clear. And perhaps some of us remember this from childhood. The purpose of the story is to put Jesus first.

[5 : 14] Jesus is the leader. Jesus is the leader. And we are called by Jesus to follow him. We don't get to choose our leader.

We don't get a say in which direction he will lead us. We don't even get to pick how we will follow him.

Jesus is the leader. All we have to do is one step at a time follow him. Don't you like it when it turns out that there really is only one thing to do?

It would make a nice difference some days. Our city fathers built a statue to David Hume.

David Hume wrote that we can never trust any report of a miracle. He was entirely rational and materialistic. And today, tourists drop his big toe for good luck.

[6 : 23] That's where you're not believing in miracles get you. A miracle is not a surprising or unexpected event.

A miracle is something which God does. A miracle is God at work in our lives. If God is not involved in making it happen, it isn't a miracle.

And so we come to this story in Luke 5 and we ask, where is God involved in this story? Where do we see God in these verses?

The only person we see at work in the story is Jesus. We need to remember what we sang in our Christmas carols.

Jesus is God. God of God, light of lights, true God from true God, light of light eternal. It's all true.

[7 : 34] Jesus is God. When we see Jesus working wonders with all the power of God displayed in them, the purpose is that we might know Jesus is God.

There is no difference between Jesus and God. Now, one of the reasons why some people say they don't believe the gospel is they say they can't believe in miracles.

Rationally, intellectually, they cannot explain how a miracle has happened. And they choose not to believe anything because they can't explain miracles.

The problem with this is, why do you or any other human expect that we can explain everything that God does? Remember, a miracle is not something unexpected that happens.

A miracle is something that God does. When did we get so clever that we could explain the work of God?

[8 : 48] As disciples of Jesus, who is God, we trust him. We do not disengage our brain and believe any and every report of any unusual event.

An unusual event is not a miracle. We look for God to be at work among us. When we see God at work in Jesus, through Jesus, for us, we believe and trust the goodness of God displayed in Christ.

That's why we trust him. And so you might ask, well, why does God do miracles?

Why did Jesus do miracles? Why are they recorded in the gospel? And this story helps us answer this first question. Notice how Simon responded to Jesus' word to put out into the deep for a catch.

Simon answered, Master, we told all night and we took nothing, but at your word I will let down the nets. Perhaps you need to imagine Simon here with a Glasgow accent, but we can just imagine the tone of doubt and suspicion in his voice.

[10:21] Really? We've been at this all night and we know more about this than you do and you think we're going to go out and catch fish.

But seeing the large catch of fish, noticing that the nets were beginning to break and the boats were beginning to sink, Peter fell down at Jesus' knees.

Jesus does miracles to grow faith. That's the reason why Jesus does miracles. To grow faith.

I wonder, did any of you get one of those amaryllis plants for Christmas this year? Some people are nodding and some people are... There's a box and in it there's a pot and there's a bag with dirt and there's a bulb.

If you want the thing to grow, there is something you need to do. You need to take it out of the box, you need to put the dirt in the pot and the plant in the dirt and then you need to water it and put it in the sunlight.

[11:32] The plant's not going to grow on its own. Miracles are a bit like the soil and the water and the sunlight which the plant needs to grow.

These miracles that Jesus has done grow our faith. Jesus is at work in your life and mine so that we will have evidence of his being God.

So that our faith will grow. This is what is happening in our story. This is what is happening in our lives. We follow Jesus because we know he is God.

We follow Jesus because he is powerfully at work in our lives. We pray for displays of Jesus' power.

We live with our eyes wide open looking for signs of Jesus at work in our lives and in the world. We long to grow in our faith.

[12:50] The good news is Jesus is at work to grow our faith. Jesus is the one who nurtures and matures our faith as he works powerfully within us.

But when Simon Peter saw all this the fish and the nets breaking and the boats sinking he fell down at Jesus' knees saying depart from me for I am a sinful man oh Lord.

Peter recognises God in Jesus. Peter immediately then asks him to go away. This is not a denial of Jesus.

This is the response of faith. In this verse Peter uses the word Lord to identify the overwhelming holiness of Jesus.

Back in the Old Testament Isaiah had a vision of God. The seraphim were singing holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of his glory.

[14:04] Do you remember what Isaiah did next? Saw this vision of God's holiness heard the hymn of the angels. He said Woe is me for I am lost.

I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips. My eyes have seen the King the Lord of hosts. Isaiah speaks words of confession of sin.

Peter in the presence of the holiness of God in Jesus speaks words of confession of sin. Isaiah speaks of being lost.

Peter asks Jesus to go away from him. How can any sinful person live in the presence of a holy God?

You need to go away from me. You never get part of God. Every time God shows up and is at work in your life you get all of God.

[15:16] The whole of God. Every bit of him. All his abundant power. All his overwhelming holiness. You don't get one without the other.

This is good news. Every time God works in your life all of God works in your life. All his power. All his holiness. All his grace.

All his mercy. All his love. Never just the part. Always the whole of God. God didn't leave Isaiah.

God cleansed him and sent him out on mission. Jesus doesn't leave Peter. Jesus who is God with us will never leave you or me.

There is nothing you can confess to Jesus that he doesn't already know. and still he loves you. Still he wants to be with you.

[16:21] When we see something of the holiness of Jesus the response of faith is humble repentance and confession of sin.

Getting to know Jesus and becoming aware of your sin go together. When you become aware of your sin it doesn't mean the gospel isn't working.

Quite the opposite. It means the gospel is doing exactly what it should do. Jesus stays with Peter.

Jesus accepts his confession of sin and Jesus begins the lifelong work of cleansing Peter from his sin.

in the same way Jesus stays with us. Jesus accepts the confession of our sin which his holiness draws from us and he begins the lifelong work of cleansing us from our sin.

[17:29] this is why we follow Jesus this is why we walk with him there is no other way to be made right with God there is no other way to be made clean from our sin there is no other way to be set free from the power of sin Jesus displays the power and the holiness of God he grows our faith that we might respond in humility and in confession before him when you are troubled by your sin this means that God is at work in your life the only way to respond to that is to run to Jesus to depend upon Jesus and stay close to him there is no other way to walk with

Jesus than this way Jesus will stay with every sinner because that's who Jesus has come to save you and me and we thank God for it at the end of the story Jesus connects the experience of Peter and James and John this catch of fish they obeyed his word they went out to the deep they caught fish a huge catch of fish Jesus connects this experience with how they are going to follow Jesus and serve him but first of all Jesus says don't be afraid every human who has a living and powerful experience of the power and holiness of God ends up terrified and so God seems all the way through the

Bible to be saying to people don't be afraid don't be afraid the power and holiness of God are at work in your life for your blessing for your transformation for your good don't be afraid Jesus says to Peter in the same way as you obeyed my word and put out into the lake and let down your nets and caught fish in the same way when you obey my word in the gospel and I send you out on mission in the same way you will catch other people you will be sent to others and they will get to know me as you obey my word as you follow me others will learn how to follow me and this is what

Jesus says to us everyone who recognizes Jesus as God with us everyone who confesses their sin to Jesus and receives his mercy every disciple of Jesus is sent by Jesus to serve him when we follow Jesus we are sent by him to bless others when we walk with Jesus he leads us into works of mercy and grace for others the gospel is not and can never be selfish it is not about me grabbing as much of Jesus as I can and keeping him all for myself Jesus won't let me do that all who follow Jesus are sent Peter followed Jesus and begins the lifelong work of serving Jesus wonder if you remember how you first got to know

Jesus as your saviour and your Lord God that story is your story which Jesus sends you to share with others and as other people hear your story they will be attracted to get to know Jesus for themselves I wonder if you've noticed the difference in your life when you confess your sin and receive the forgiveness of your sins don't you think others would benefit from your story your testimony to your experience don't you think there are others in your street in our city who hunger for freedom from sin your story is what you are sent to share with them have you not in your fellowship in the church been blessed to receive kindness and patience from others don't you think that you could live in the same kindness and patience towards others and they would be blessed by that this is how

[22:59] Jesus fished for you he sent someone to tell you their story about how they got to know him he sent someone to speak with you about confession and the forgiveness of sins he sent someone perhaps someone in this room to be kind to you and patient with you this is how Jesus has fished for you and now he wants to send you to fish for him amongst!

others Jesus is more amazing more wonderful than we could ever imagine there is no other like Jesus whom we should follow and trust we have been designed to live by faith and Jesus comes and works in your life to grow your faith we have all rebelled against God and getting to know Jesus we are ashamed of that rebellion.

Jesus stays with us so that day by day he might wash us clean and make us right with God. Following Jesus we receive and are blessed by the good news and Jesus would send us in turn to make that good news known to others.

Yes in our words, yes in our transformed lives yes in our deeds of kindness and patience ordinary things that we can do.

Today, this first Sunday of a new year is a good day for us to walk with Jesus. It's also a good day for us to recommit ourselves to walk with Jesus tomorrow and the day after and every day after until he comes or calls us home.

[25:03] Today is a good day to walk with Jesus. Let's pray together. Father, we thank you for this good news which you have declared in our ears that Jesus is God with us.

we pray for more of his work within us. We pray for more of his cleansing upon us. We pray for more obedience to being sent by Jesus that we might go and bless others.

Be at work among us we pray for this. In Jesus name. Amen. Amen.