

The First Followers

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[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 1st of June 2003. The preacher is Danny Saunders.

His sermon is entitled The First Followers and is based on Luke chapter 5 verses 1 to 11. There are different religions that people follow in our society. There are followers of Buddha, followers of Muhammad, followers of Confucius, followers of witchcraft and Wicca and yin and yang, followers of Krishna, followers of Egyptian goddesses and superstition. And the Australian census even revealed that some people will admit to following Jedi Knights. So there's all sorts of New Age ideas and practices that people in our community follow. And we live in a world where people don't follow truth. People couldn't care less if what they're following is true. As long as it works for them. This is relativism.

[1 : 05] This is post-modernism where there's no absolutes. Everything is relative. Follow whatever you please. Of course, everything is relative is itself an absolute statement.

But a true post-modernist is going to be happy to live with that inconsistency. They'll also be happy to believe that all religions are the same. Even though followers of Jesus will know that religions are very different.

So the questions for tonight are, who do you follow? Where do you stand before Jesus? Why follow Jesus? Who do you follow? Where do you stand before Jesus?

Why follow Jesus? Tonight we meet some of the first followers of Jesus. And the main purpose of tonight's passage is to show us, the readers, what happens when Simon comes face to face with Jesus.

What happens as a result of this encounter? What makes him and his partners prepared to leave everything and follow Jesus? Why do they choose to follow Jesus? Well, you might be wondering, why would anyone want to follow Jesus?

[2 : 18] Christians and Jesus, they're ridiculed in our society, in the news, in TV shows, in movies. Why would anyone want to follow Jesus? Well, when Jesus was actually walking around on the earth, this question didn't seem to be a problem.

Lots of people were following Jesus, and we can see that in verse 1 of tonight's passage. Once while Jesus was standing beside the lake of Gynasaret, which is the Sea of Galilee, which is much easier to say, and the crowd was pressing in on him to hear the word of God.

So here we see the whole crowd pressing in to hear what Jesus had to say. And Jesus' words here are referred to as the word of God. Now, if we look back to the end of chapter 4, and so I'm not going to be giving out lollipops for the right answer, but in chapter 4 we see that Jesus has been preaching the good news of the kingdom of God in the synagogues and in the towns.

So this preaching of the good news is what Jesus is proclaiming. This is what is the word of God, the good news of the kingdom of God. So it's clear that something really huge is happening here. Jesus is performing miracles and he's healing people at the end of chapter 4, and now he's proclaiming that the kingdom of God has come. It's no wonder that he's caused a crowd to gather around him.

[3 : 31] Curious crowds have begun to follow him everywhere he goes, to look for him, to see what he's going to do next, and to hear what he has to say. So you get this picture of Jesus being pushed back and back by the crowds until he's trapped by the lake.

He can't go any further. He'd literally be in the water if he went any further backwards. But the crowds continue to press in and come to him. So Jesus finds a way to break from the crowd by getting into a boat that's sitting at the shore.

And this is in verse 2 and 3, and we saw this on the video. It's from verse 2. He saw two boats there at the shore of the lake. The fishermen had gone out of them and were washing their nets. He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Then he sat down and taught the crowds from the boat. The people are hungry to hear God's word.

And Jesus continues to teach the crowds from the boat so he doesn't get crushed by the crowds. But also by getting into the boat, this brings Jesus into direct contact with Simon, the fisherman who owns the boat.

[4 : 38] It's no accident that Jesus chooses to get into Peter's boat, Simon's boat. Simon probably met Jesus when Jesus came to his house and healed his mother-in-law. And that's back in chapter 4, verse 38.

You can see that. And Simon would have witnessed this healing and other miracles Jesus was doing. And so Jesus and Simon, they're probably already familiar with each other. Also, don't get confused with the name Simon, like I just did.

Jesus later does rename him Peter. So this is the Apostle Peter that has such a large part to play as Jesus' closest disciple and as a leader to the early church.

You'll see in verse 8, he uses both names, Simon and Peter, together. So I'll keep calling him Simon because that's what he's called in this passage. But this is the same Simon who becomes Peter the Apostle.

So when Jesus is finished teaching the crowd, he turns to Simon. And this is a turning point in the story because up until now, Jesus has only preached before the crowds. But this is a one-on-one personal story.

[5 : 39] We get to see what happens when Simon comes face to face with Jesus. What happens as a result of this personal encounter with Jesus? Why does he follow Jesus? Simon isn't just another face in the crowd.

This is a one-on-one personal meeting with Jesus. What's going to happen? Well, they start speaking to each other in verses 4 and 5. When Jesus had finished speaking, he said to Simon, put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.

Simon answered, Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets. I don't know if you've ever been fishing and not caught anything.

It's definitely happened to me a lot of times. It's very frustrating and disheartening. You get all the effort of getting your gear together, making sure you've got all your tackle and all the right hooks and all the right sinkers.

You find your spot on the jetty and you pull out your gear and of course there's knots everywhere in your line so you've got to undo the knots and you've got to try and get little worms or fish or whatever it is that you're using for bait onto the hooks.

[6 : 51] And when you finally get the line into the water, you inevitably get snagged and you have to pull in your line again and the bait's gone and all you've got is seaweed. You can't quite eat that.

And you repeat the process over and over again until all the barbecue shapes have gone and you decide to go home with no fresh fish for dinner. Well, the situation with Simon is a little bit different.

He was a professional fisherman. He was using boats and he was using nets. He knew what he was doing. He'd been fishing all night long, at night, which was the best time for fishing.

But he'd caught nothing. He and his partners had worked hard all night and now tired and weary from this work. You know, they hadn't been on a comfortable charter cruise off the coast of Queensland.

These were professional fishermen. They'd worked hard all night long and they caught nothing. And then we have Jesus, a carpenter by trade, telling the professional fishermen just to go out into the deep water, let down their nets for a catch.

[7 : 52] So Simon's response, at first, is reasonable. He's not being disrespectful to Jesus when he calls him master. That's a title of respect. But he does register a slight protest.

He says, well, we're fished all night and caught nothing. He's in the middle of washing his nets and packing up to go home and sleep. The barbecue shapes run out long ago and now Jesus wants them to go out in the daytime and try again.

You know, this is a bit like one of us knowing nothing about fishing, going up to Rex Hunt when he hasn't caught anything, if that ever actually happens, and saying to Rex, Rex, just go out there a bit

further, a bit beyond the sort of the bay there and throw in your line and you'll get a catch there. You know what Rex is like. He'll look at us and think we were crazy. He's the master fisherman. What would we know about catching fish? So in this story, Simon's the master fisherman. He's the professional. What would Jesus know about catching fish? There's really nothing to compel Simon to follow Jesus' request except his basic faith at this stage or even a hunch at this stage that Jesus might really be from God.

[9 : 05] So in the end, Simon says, if you say so, I will let down the nets. Simon reluctantly agrees only because it's Jesus that asks him.

Simon probably thought that the request was useless. The fish were simply not biting. But he's willing to obey because it's Jesus that asks him. And this shows that he's realised that Jesus has some sort of authority that shouldn't be ignored.

even though he might not have agreed with the idea, he still trusts Jesus. This sets up the miracle because it shows that it's really Jesus who's in control of this situation.

So what happens next is in verses 6 and 7. When they let down their nets, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. So they signalled to their partners in the other boat to come and help them.

And they came and filled both boats so that they began to sink. What an amazing result! Fish everywhere! More that they could handle. Their partners have to come to help them take in the catch.

[10 : 10] And we're told in verse 10 that their partners are James and John and it's probable that Simon's brother Andrew is there as well. And there's so many nets that the fish, there's so many fish coming in that the nets are breaking.

Both boats are filled to such a point that they're beginning to sink. You can just imagine the commotion that this would have caused as they took on so much weight from the fish that they began to sink.

Now we don't know whether Jesus just happened to know where the fish were biting that day, where they were going to be, or if Jesus somehow summoned the fish to him, you know, a bit like Tarzan calling the animals in the jungle to come to him.

But I don't think we're meant to argue about the mechanics of the miracle. We're not told how the miracle happened and it's something that we're not capable or not meant to understand. The point of the miracle is to display Jesus' power and to demonstrate the effect that this has on Simon and on the others that witnessed the miracle.

And we know from verse 9 that they're amazed at the size of the catch that they've taken. They know something's going on here. This isn't a natural catch. They recognise that God is at work in this event.

[11 : 18] They're humble, unworthy fishermen at the lowest ends of the social scale and yet here they benefit from God's graciousness and his power working through Jesus.

They're amazed and they're overwhelmed at what has happened and what they've witnessed. But the main purpose of the story is the effect on Simon. So the narrative focuses in on Simon's response.

Well, you might think that faced with this huge haul of fish he would be thanking Jesus and you'd be overjoyed at this catch. But he recognises that this is a miracle and so he responds to Jesus with awe and with fear.

In verse 8 it says, But when Simon Peter saw it he fell down at Jesus' knees saying, Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man. So his response was to fall at Jesus' feet, his knees and say, Go away from me, Lord, I am a sinful man.

Simon recognises Jesus' authority and his power and so he falls at Jesus' knees out of humility and out of fear before the divine.

[12 : 28] This action shows just how overwhelmed Simon had become. This is a natural reaction when a human comes face to face with God. Isaiah cried, Woe is me, I am a man of unclean lips.

And John in Revelation and when he sees Jesus revealed in his glory, he falls at his feet as though dead. So Simon's reaction isn't surprising really. The commotion around him, all the fish, the sinking boat, it all becomes unimportant.

Nothing else matters when faced with the question of who Jesus is. So the chaos around him becomes secondary to sorting out where he stands before Jesus.

The chaos around him becomes secondary to sorting out where he stands before Jesus. He's not concerned that the boat's about to sink or that he's just received more fish than he's ever caught before in his life.

His main concern is where does he stand before Jesus? Where does he stand before Jesus? This is his main concern at this point. Well, verse 8 tells us three things about his response to this question.

[13:41] Firstly, he asks Jesus to go away from him. Simon knows that he's a sinful man and so the presence of Jesus gives him a sense of his unworthiness. He's confronted with the majesty of Jesus and compared to his own sinfulness, he wants to get away and hide.

It might be a bit like a dog sort of whimpering and cowering and hiding away when it knows it's in trouble, when it's done something wrong and its owner comes and it knows it's going to get a whack or something and it sort of cowers away, wants to go and hide.

But of course there's nowhere for Simon to hide on the boat and there's nowhere for Jesus to go. He can't go anywhere. They're on a boat. So secondly, Simon falls at the knees of Jesus and confesses his sinfulness.

He wants Jesus to have mercy on him because Simon recognises and confesses that he is a sinful man. Simon isn't talking about any particular thing that he's done just at that time.

Rather, he's recognising his fallen character, his actual identity as a sinner, not anything he's actually done. He's out in a boat. So when confronted with the divine nature of Jesus, he realised that he's flawed, that he's a sinful human being.

[14:54] He's coming to recognise who Jesus is and so he's overwhelmed by his own sense of sinfulness and he confesses this to Jesus. Thirdly, Simon addresses Jesus as Lord here.

He no longer uses the term Master that he used back in verse 5. So Simon is changed by this encounter. He uses the title Lord because he recognises that Jesus isn't just a wise teacher or a spiritual guru.

Jesus is Lord to be obeyed. Jesus is the Lord who exposes the true condition of humanity. Simon recognises Jesus' power and that God is working through him and so he uses this title when he says go away from me Lord, I'm a sinful man.

It's clear that this is a turning point for Simon. He's changed by this encounter. He can't deny that Jesus is God's agent and his confession is the beginning of the disciples' understanding about who Jesus is.

We know from the rest of Luke's story that Simon doesn't totally understand who Jesus is at this moment but this is still a major turning point. This is the beginning of him understanding who Jesus really is.

[16:08] So Simon wants Jesus to leave him. Witnessing the power of Jesus only makes him aware of his own unworthiness and so he confesses that he is a sinner. What Jesus' response to Simon is in verse 10.

He says to Simon do not be afraid from now on you'll be catching people. Do not be afraid from now on you'll be catching people. These must have been really comforting great words for Simon to hear.

You know Jesus doesn't judge him. Jesus doesn't turn his back on him in disgust at his confession. Jesus doesn't get angry and yell at Simon. He doesn't threaten to punish the humble sinner.

He doesn't respond in any of these ways. Instead he seeks to calm Simon by telling him not to fear. Jesus doesn't want anyone to run and hide from his presence. He came to forgive sin.

Just look across in your Bibles at the next column in chapter 5 verse 20 and then in verse 24. Jesus has authority not just over the fish of the sea but he has authority on earth to forgive sin.

[17:19] Jesus has come to call sinners to repentance. Jesus wants people to confess their sin and draw near to him. He wants that. He wants people to seek forgiveness. We don't have to run and hide from God.

Jesus came to forgive our sins so that we can draw near to him. So Jesus comforts Simon. He says do not be afraid because he is calming Simon's fear of being exposed in his sinful condition before a holy God.

Jesus the Lord is saying to Simon the sinner it's okay. I don't need to leave and you don't need to run away and hide. Do not be afraid. Simon is comforted and he is also told that things are now different.

From now on suggests that a turning point has been reached. From now on things will be different for Simon. From now on he will be catching people. Notice that Jesus doesn't actually invite Simon to follow him.

He must assume that the forgiven sinner will gratefully follow when he is clear that he has been forgiven. But Jesus does promise what Simon's new vocation will be. He will be catching people. [18:30] This doesn't mean that Simon is going to be out killing people and hauling them in like he would do with fish. Catching them and then whatever with fish. The words here actually mean capturing alive.

The analogy Jesus is making is that people are rescued for God by being saved from the danger of sin and God's judgment that comes because of sin. So this is catching people for heaven. This is about salvation. People being saved from the danger of eternal judgment by being born again and taken alive into the kingdom of God. So Simon is told that his job now is to help God in this rescue mission.

From now on he will share in the ongoing mission of Jesus. Becoming a disciple of Jesus means sharing in the mission of Jesus. Becoming a disciple of Jesus means sharing in the mission of Jesus.

It's fantastic that we've got the rest of the story of the early church recorded in the New Testament because we can see, we can have a look and see these words coming true. How will Simon fish for people?

[19:36] Well at the start of the book of Acts it's Simon who's then called Peter who stands up at Pentecost to preach before the crowds that have gathered. He explains the gospel to them and the crowds ask him what are we to do?

And he says repent and be baptised every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven. There it is. And it says that that day about 3,000 people were saved.

So this is Simon no longer afraid. This is Simon explaining to others what he knows is true in his own life that Jesus came to forgive sin.

This is Simon out fishing for people, out sharing in the mission of Jesus. So the life of discipleship begins that day for Simon and his partners and our final verse says when they had brought their boats to shore they left everything and followed him.

Fairly sort of insignificant words but they have so much meaning. They left the greatest catch they'd ever seen in all their lives and followed Jesus, became his disciples and shared in his mission.

[20:44] And look, this catch would have been extremely valuable to them at the market but this wasn't important to them. It was no longer important. This is a great challenge to our society. We value financial gain as one of the highest and most important things in life.

Imagine a group of struggling gold miners mining and panning for gold on the hills of Bendigo. They've tried all their lives for that big strike to find that big gold vein in the rock or that huge nugget. Jesus comes along and says just go and dig right over there in that place under that rock and you'll get a strike. So they dig exactly where Jesus tells them and they find all the gold they could ever want, millions and millions of dollars worth.

Yet Jesus just stands before them and his presence in the miracle discovery makes them shake with fear of what else this man might know about them or do to them. They realise they're in the presence of the divine.

This is no ordinary teacher or guru or religious leader. This is the true Lord, the Lord of the universe. The gold is no longer important. Where they stand before Jesus becomes their only concern.

[21:59] They recognise their sinful condition and the offer of forgiveness and new life that Jesus offers them and so they walk away. They leave their tools and the gold exactly where it is and they follow him and share in his mission.

This illustration might sound impossible for us in our capitalist society but Simon didn't hesitate to leave the fish behind, the biggest catch of his life and simply follow Jesus.

Simon wasn't thinking about updating his boat to the newest and latest model with all the best fishing gear and rig and then he'll follow Jesus. He wasn't thinking that finally he could dock his boat at the best marina in Galilee and once that's paid off then he'll follow Jesus.

No, he simply left everything and followed Jesus. So I began tonight by asking some questions. Who do you follow?

Where do you stand with Jesus? Why follow Jesus? Well, we should follow Jesus because he's in the business of saving people. As we've seen from Simon's confession, an honest assessment of our spiritual condition is that we are sinful.

[23 : 09] We're all like Simon. We've all sinned and fallen short of God's standards. We don't have to look very far in our news to see that our world is fundamentally flawed and we don't have to look very far in our own lives when we hold our own lives up before Jesus to see that that flaw is part of all of us.

We're all unworthy before God. There's no one that is righteous, not even one. But the good news is that Jesus has authority on earth to forgive sin.

When we honestly confess our condition to him, he tells us not to be afraid. We don't have to run away from Jesus. He's the only one with the authority to forgive us, so we should be running to him. We should follow Jesus because there's salvation in no one else. There's no other name from under heaven given to us by which we can be saved. No other spiritual leader or guru or superstition or horoscope makes the claims that Jesus makes regarding his ability to forgive sin and save us.

Not Buffy, not dark angel, not charm, not Buddha, not Krishna, not Muhammad. Only Jesus claims to forgive sin. The Bible says there's one God and there's one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all.

[24 : 31] Jesus graciously forgave the sin of Simon and he can forgive the sin of you and of me. Jesus can do this because he gave his life as a ransom for us.

He died in our place on the cross to take our sin and judgment upon sin that we deserve. He died for us to take God's punishment for us.

But Jesus then rose again and this shows that he's defeated sin once and for all and that he has the power and authority over sin and death. So you should follow Jesus because he's the only one who can forgive your sin.

And if your sin is not forgiven, you will face God's judgment and punishment for your sin on your own. John's gospel puts it like this. God so loved the world that he gave his only son so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through him. Those who believe in Jesus are not condemned but those who do not believe are condemned already because they have not believed in the name of the only son of God.

[25 : 47] Well the call of Simon and his partners is a call to a special group there's no doubt. It's the call of the first disciples but even though they're a special group their response to Jesus is a great example to us.

Their response shows us why we should follow Jesus and what it means to follow Jesus. Firstly a follower of Jesus must trust Jesus even when we can't understand.

Simon had fished all night and he thought that it was useless yet because Jesus asked him he did it. As followers of Jesus we should be ready to do the same.

If Jesus is saying to you trust him and let down your net then we should be doing that. Secondly confession of sin is a great thing. It's great because Jesus doesn't want us to hide away and run. He says don't be afraid because he'll forgive us. This is great news. Simon's confession that he was a sinner before the Lord leads to his ability to be able to serve God.

[26 : 49] We can't follow Jesus if we can't admit that we're sinful. But our forgiveness and our standing before God totally depend on what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

Not on our own efforts. Other religions might tell us that we've got to meditate to reach our goal or we've got to eat the right foods or we've got to do the right things or we've got to be born in the right group in the right caste.

But Jesus simply says come and don't be afraid. Your sins are forgiven. This is God's grace that he gives us as a free gift. Confession isn't meant to make us feel guilty.

It's to release us from fear and guilt so that by trusting Jesus we can then walk with him and turn away from sin. And thirdly becoming a disciple of Jesus means sharing in the mission of Jesus. Receiving God's grace and forgiveness will make a difference in your life. God may not ask you to abandon your nets but following Jesus means becoming a disciple of Jesus and this does mean sharing in his mission.

[27 : 56] You need to be willing to abandon your nets or anything else that gets in the way of you sharing in this mission. Otherwise you need to ask yourself who is it or what is it that you are following?

Are you living to be a part of the mission of Jesus or are you living for something else? If I can use a sporting metaphor, a follower must be on the ground in the game, not watching in the stands.

Sure, some players will play in different positions, some may be more able and more gifted but every follower is on the ground in the game and contributing. Being a disciple of Jesus, following Jesus and being part of a church, it's a team game.

We're all involved. You might think that you can sit in the stands and watch but following Jesus isn't a spectator sport. He asks us to come and follow him. Simon didn't wave to Jesus from his boat as he sort of went past on his teaching tour.

He joined the team, he got involved, he got into the game. So the first followers of Jesus are a great example for us. Everything going on around them, all the chaos and commotion of their busy lives became secondary to their primary concern of sorting out where they stood before Jesus.

[29 : 13] They made an honest assessment of their condition. They confessed their sin and they accepted the forgiveness that Jesus offers. After meeting Jesus, they didn't sit in the stands and count their fish and wonder at how lucky and how blessed they were.

They trusted Jesus in faith and they were willing to do whatever he asked of them. They became followers and disciples of Jesus. Their example shows us that becoming a disciple of Jesus means sharing in the mission of Jesus.

So let's finish tonight by taking away and asking ourselves the questions that are raised by this passage. Where do you stand before Jesus? Who do you follow?

Have you made an honest assessment of your spiritual condition? Are you running away from Jesus or have you fallen at his feet, received his forgiveness and now seek to follow him?

Are you prepared to trust him and put down your nets when he asks? Are you willing to abandon your nets if he calls? How will you share in the mission of Jesus?

[30 : 26] Are you willing to