

# North Kildonan United Church

6<sup>th</sup> February 2022 ~Rev. Don Johnson

## “Simon Peter”

*Isaiah 6: 1-8*

*I Corinthians 15: 1-11*

*Luke 5: 1-11*

*Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable to you, O Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.*

Two weeks ago we heard Luke’s account of Jesus pronouncing what we might understand as his mission statement in a Galilee synagogue.

*“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favour.”*

His words received a mixed response, and by the time he was done the people were ready to throw him off a cliff. Basically it was a case of a local boy comes home with a message that his former neighbours don’t want to hear. Of course Jesus may not have helped the situation by saying: *“truly I tell you, no prophet is accepted in the prophet’s hometown.”*

To be fair, the townspeople were initially open to what Jesus had to say. *“Is this not Joseph’s son?”* they ask, and the text says that all spoke well of him and were amazed at the gracious words that came from his mouth. But then Jesus said enough to provoke them into a rage that resulted in him being driven out of town. This would not be the only time people would want to silence Jesus, and in the midst of the angry group gathered to do him in, Jesus passed through them and went on his way.

Jesus is still on his own at this point in Luke’s narrative. In the accounts in Mark and Matthew, Jesus called a few followers to him before setting out to preach the gospel, but not so with Luke.

Today’s account opens with Jesus recruiting Simon Peter, his first and prime disciple. We find Jesus by the lakeshore, where he has been preaching to a crowd of people. Nearby he sees two boats and some fishermen cleaning their nets. These poor men are exhausted after a fruitless fishing expedition. All night they cast their nets, to no avail. Even though Jesus can tell they are exhausted, he asks Simon to get into the boat with him and go out a bit from the shore so that Jesus can preach more easily to the crowd still eager for the Word. This will not be the only time that followers of Jesus find themselves pushed beyond their limits for the sake of the Kingdom of God.

So, Jesus takes a risk by asking Simon Peter for a ride in the boat. Simon might say no, tell Jesus to bother someone else, and in doing so Jesus would lose a person he perceives to have the right qualities for discipleship.

But Simon, or Peter as we will come to know him, does not say no, does not walk away. Even though at a later, more crucial date, he will deny Jesus three times, at this point in the gospel, Simon says yes.

Then Jesus does a strange thing. He finishes up his address to the crowd and then he tells Simon, a skilled fisherman, to cast his nets. Really, Simon must be wondering, we've fished this area all night and nothing, and now, you want us to go at it again?

But Simon trusts Jesus and lowers his nets. The catch is so vast that another boat has to come over to share in the bounty. So much fish that the boats are in danger of sinking.

Simon is overwhelmed at the quantity of fish caught and he feels unworthy to be involved in this miracle. *"Go away from me Lord, for I am a sinful man!"*

Sinful people, or at least people who acknowledge how sinful they actually are, are the type that Jesus calls to his ministry. Jesus says to Simon, *"Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people."* This invitation is also extended to Simon's partners, James and John, sons of Zebedee. As Luke puts it: *"When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him."*

How extraordinary! Here were three fishermen whose livelihood was in fishing, whose skillset was in tending to boats and repairing torn nets and knowing the best places to fish and when to fish. They knew where to take their catch for the best price and why would they do anything else with their lives? Not only that, but this catch they eventually hauled to shore was unlike anything they had ever encountered before. If there was ever a time to stay in the business, to keep sailing the waters and catching fish, this was it. But they leave everything behind and begin a new, unknown, perhaps not very safe life with this preacher.

Simon Peter, James and John, the first disciples in Luke's account, three people who trusted Jesus, trusted him with their very lives, and in response to his invitation, they began a new utterly life changing adventure. Nothing would be the same for any of them.

As one commentator puts it, *"It is clear to Simon that something out of the ordinary has happened. He knows that he is standing in the presence of someone who mediates the immediacy of the divine presence. This profound religious experience has put his life under a new spotlight and set in motion a path towards transformation. Simon becomes aware of his unworthiness and diminutive stature in the presence of the Divine; so he underscores his sinfulness and asks that Jesus depart from him. But rather than writing*

*him off, Jesus now reveals to him the potential that resides in him through a participation in the work of God. 'From now on you will be catching people.'*"

The story of Simon Peter is not an isolated incident. How many women and men have abandoned everything to follow Jesus, have put aside their dreams and plans for the future because they sensed, deep within them, that God was calling them to something greater, something more profound, something not necessarily safe or comfortable but something which was the work and ministry of God. Or we think of those individuals who honoured their responsibilities to their family with their secular careers, and then when retirement was possible they entered into the ministry.

Of course, we cannot minimize the cost of responding to the calling of God. In Simon Peter's case, for instance, he was a married man. In the latter part of chapter 4 we find Luke's account of Jesus leaving the murderous mob at the synagogue and going to Simon's house. Simon's mother-in-law was sick and Jesus was asked to help her. She was healed, and like a loving mother-in-law, she left her sick bed and attended to the needs of those in her home. History does not record how Simon broke the news to his wife that his life had taken a different course and she shouldn't expect him home for supper anytime soon, or indeed, ever again.

Nor can we underestimate the role Simon, later called Peter, the rock on which Jesus would build his church, would play. As the first pope, who later would be martyred upside down on a cross, Peter profoundly influenced the growth and development of the early days of the church.

Peter didn't need to stop fishing that day. He could have ignored the invitation, thanked Jesus for the harvest of fish and headed to the market to make some money. But he didn't, and from that moment on his life was profoundly changed.

I don't know if you do this but there are times when I look back on my life, and I think of the decisions I made, and the chances I took, and remember the people who influenced me, and I wonder, what if. What if I hadn't been involved in a singing group which led to being invited into the choir of one of our United Churches, which led to exploring the call to ministry, and the strong support of that congregation in my journey towards ordination, which led to all the meaningful experiences of serving the church and meeting such wonderful people in the church. Not sure how I would answer that 'what if' question, where I would be or what I would be doing, if I had made a different choice.

I suspect each of us has our own story of how we became involved in the church and through that involvement found our lives blessed and enriched beyond our imagining, and that we wouldn't want to have it any other way. If the pandemic has taught us anything, it is the value of community, of worshipping together and working together, of being concerned about one another in their trials and celebrating with them

their joys. Christ emphasised that the two great commandments are to love God with everything we have and everything we are, and to love our neighbour as ourselves. And we best fulfill those commandments when we are able to gather together as the body of Christ, a loving faith community, and be the church Christ has invited us to be.

Amen.