

Sermon preached by Rev Rachel McDougall

St Paul's Canterbury

Epiphany 5C

Sunday 6th February 2022

'If you say so I will'

It is a moment, one decision that can change everything.

Jesus challenges Peter to put out into the deep waters and let down nets for a catch.

Peter has already been there and done that all night and has nothing to show for it.

He would've been exhausted.

This whole passage pivots on Peter's response – 'if you say so I will put down the nets.'

Who knows what prompts Peter to trust Jesus and to do this one thing differently – putting the nets out during the day?

Is there something about Jesus' presence?

Perhaps it is what he has been hearing whilst Jesus has been sitting in Peter's boat teaching the crowds.

Peter chooses to do the one thing differently and the abundance of the catch is so great other boats have to come to help.

Peter has reluctantly agreed to Jesus' request probably not believing anything will come of it.

He finds himself surprised and recognises that something greater than him is at work.

He acknowledges his frailty before Jesus.

'If you say so' I will isn't a fulsome response – it has more than a hint of hesitation about it.

God can work with the hesitant and the reluctant.

For Peter this moment opens out in ways he can barely imagine or dream about.

He hears the reassuring words of Jesus and the call to be part of God's project of people becoming fully alive.

In these uncertain days as we pivot from one reality to another, we are aware of change being afoot.

It can be tempting to retreat into our shells, to stay with the same old ways of doing things.

It is so human to be tempted to leave our boat in shallow waters, in the safety of the harbour, yet this is not what ships are for.

God invites us to have courage to put out into the deep, to the place of chaos, the place of the unknown and to do one thing differently.

Peter receives his invitation during his day to day life.

For most of us our call is lived out in our ordinary life in what we do every day. God comes to us and invites us to a larger view of life and encourages us to trust in God's presence.

Peter is such a relatable character. He is authentic in his reluctance, but somehow he is able to take the leap to trust in Jesus.

He trusts in Jesus' words to try once more.

As Rowan Williams writes: 'to say we believe in Jesus means that we have confidence in Jesus above all things that Jesus Christ is where we belong and the one to whom we belong.'

To be aware of our frailty and vulnerability is a given.

It is precisely this sort of person that God calls.

It is only those who have plumbed the depths of their personal fragility in the context of God's generous love that are suitable. As Paul says: 'by the grace of God I am what I am.'

There is something important about that realisation and acceptance that brings us to wholeness. This authenticity speaks for itself – as we have seen in Ash Barty and Brittany Higgins and Grace Tame.

I wonder what is one thing in your life, that you can do differently that would help you be in touch with who you are?

I wonder what is one thing you would like to do differently this year that would make a difference for others?

In uncertain times God's invitation is to keep trusting and listening to God.

For me, being open to listen to God's voice is one thing I'd like to do more. Listening to the generous loving God who

calls us all to fullness of life. Jesus' call to Peter to catch people sounds rather blunt, but the word in the Greek is '*zoein*' – it has the sense of people coming fully alive in themselves. It is ironic that this happens when we are aware of our own frailty, when something happens to us that cause us to rethink and readjust.

Peter is open to listen to Jesus. Perhaps this s one thing we can do, to be open to listen to God's voice as God speaks in those around us in our church community, in people around us and the world at large.

I wonder what is the one thing we are being called to do differently as a church community that would open us anew to trust in God rather than ourselves, to trust rather than to fear. What is the one thing we might do that can bring all of us alive in a new way.

Two guys Pat Quinn and Peter Frates were both diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease. They both decided they wanted to make a difference and to do something to help raise awareness. That was the plan – so the ice bucket challenge was born and it went viral.

It raised awareness but did so much more – it raised badly needed funds for research and support for those who suffer from this disease.

Neale Danaher has had a similar approach using the time and energy he had to raise awareness and funds for this condition and has led to the big freeze and assistance to those who suffer from it.

It is usually the case that a change comes with a decision to do something to help others or a gesture that provokes people to think and make a difference.

All it takes is the courage to listen and respond to the voice of love within us.

*You have called us
from far and near.*

*You have made us –
great and small,
each one of us different
in heart and face,
but all of us your people.*

*We ask you, then,
make new people of us
who hear your voice with living hearts.*

*Do this today
and never take your hands
away from us.*

Huub Oosterhuis.

*Lections:
Isaiah 6.1-8
Psalm 138
Luke 5.1-11*