

Called again, are we ready?

Have you ever been fishing?

I have mixed experiences.

I used to go with my Dad, we used to walk down the hill to the Witham and sit in an evening and fish. We used to sit, sometimes talking, a lot of times not, just enjoying spending time together.

The last time I went with Dad wasn't so happy, it was winter, all three of us went with our Dad to fish. I don't think we were expecting to catch anything, looking back it could have been a ploy just to get us out of the house. There was snow on the ground, it looked beautiful, but it was cold. We had been there for a couple of hours when we decided we were getting cold, and asked if we could go home. Dad didn't want to go and said if we waited half an hour we could go then... we waited, and we waited, it got colder and colder and in the end we told him we would walk home without him.

Mum was not pleased...they had words...

I can't remember us fishing again which is a shame, because it can be a time for those big conversations. I remember seeing Sam with his Dad or his Grandad sat side by side, content with silence, or with the low murmur of conversation, surrounded by the beauty of the waterside.

But I will always remember that last time with my Dad, feeling almost numb with cold, just wanting to leave, and that comes back to me when I read the gospel reading.

With that experience, I used to find it difficult to understand why it was so extraordinary that Peter, Andrew, James and John left their fishing to go with Jesus. After that final experience anything was better than fishing.

Now I know that they were not line fishing, and I know the weather would have been different, but still when this man came and said follow me, was it so amazing that they went.

Well now I think it probably was amazing. These men weren't fishing for a hobby, for a bit of quality time. Fishing was what they had been trained to do, what they did for a living. So when the man from Nazareth came walking by the lakeside that day and said to them, "Follow me and I will show you how to fish for people," why did they go with Him?

There are no clues in the gospel, there is nothing that explains that decision, it is a statement, they followed him.

Had the fishing been really slow, that day for Peter and Andrew, for James and John? We all have our bad days at work; maybe on this day the nets kept coming up empty, maybe the net-mending was especially tedious and monotonous, maybe the heat and humidity were all but unbearable.

Were James and John desperate to get away from their father? Perhaps old Zebedee was a bit of a bully, a hard task master, or perhaps he was loving and kind but they were just bored. Perhaps when Jesus gave his invitation, they jumped at the chance to leave, to do something different.

Were they looking for a good excuse to stop being fishermen? Maybe they figured fishing was a dead-end job with little chance for advancement, perhaps it was the usual, 'the grass is always greener', and Jesus came along at just the right time.

Had the four men heard people talk about Jesus, about His powerful preaching? Perhaps they had even heard Him themselves, and the thought of knowing Him, being one of His disciples, was irresistible.

Did the words, "I will show you how to fish for people," sound intriguing? Perhaps they wanted to find out what He meant by that strange expression. Perhaps it held just the right combination of novelty and intensity to pull them away from their nets, their boat, and fall in behind Him.

Was the presence of Jesus so compelling, was the sound of His voice so commanding, that they were drawn to him by some irresistible force?

Did those men have any idea that following Him would mean a radical change in their lives? Perhaps they thought "follow me" simply meant "come have a break today." Perhaps they were bored and thought that they could have a small holiday, a mini break, and tomorrow they'd be back to fishing again.

Surely they couldn't have guessed what lay ahead for them — the excitement, the fun, the grief, and the joy of it.

We simply don't know why the fishermen followed Jesus. The gospels don't tell us. All Matthew's gospel says about Peter and Andrew is that "Immediately they left their nets and followed him." All Matthew's gospel says about James and John is that: "immediately they left the boat and their father, and followed him."

Another aspect of this story that we have no knowledge of is how the families of the men felt. What about the family of Peter and Andrew?

How did Zebedee feel? One minute he was sat in the boat, working with his sons to prepare his nets and suddenly he is stood alone watching his sons walk off without a by your leave!

There would have been a major impact on both families, in that environment losing two young strong men would have caused real hardship to those left behind. But we don't know because the gospel doesn't tell us. I can only imagine the shock, perhaps the anger as the two young men, just got up and left.

Did Zebedee run after them, did he shout, rant, cajole or beg as he watched his two strong healthy sons just up and walk away.

These are questions that we don't know the answer too. But it does raise some important points.

When we feel we are being called to follow Christ, to be a Christian, something will always get left behind. It could be as simple as a few bad habits, or perhaps some friends who cannot understand why you want to change a life that seems perfectly fine the way it was.

To follow Christ means that we cannot predict what that decision will lead to. Would the four fishermen have followed Christ if they had known all that lay ahead? Maybe. Maybe not.

The point is that they didn't and couldn't know, anymore than you and I can know all that following Christ will mean for us.

I think that as a church this is a really good time to think about what being a Christian means. What does being open to Christ loving us and calling us mean?

This year is going to be a big year for this church because after a years of stability things will change. Tricia will be changing her ministry, she has been praying and listening for a long time and now that change is approaching. My change is slightly more pragmatic, with David changing jobs a year ago, I knew that we would move geographically, but I wasn't aware of how much I would be aware of Christ working in my life, showing me a way forward that I hadn't been looking for. For Tricia and I that will make a huge impact on our families.

Elizabeth is coming, again that means change for her, for her husband and for you.

This is the point, isn't it.

His call comes not just once in your life, but many times. There are calls to a vocation, or to change vocations. There are calls to a particular place, to a specific community.

There are calls to a task, and there are calls to stop what you are doing and find refreshment for your spirit.

There are calls into and out of relationships.

There are calls to regret what you have done, to repent and make amends. And there are calls to stop regretting, to accept the fact that you are forgiven and get on with your life.

Is Jesus calling you to leave your nets?

Sometimes the call of Christ is as loud and clear as a siren. Sometimes, many times, His call is more like a still, small voice.

In this year of change, the call that has lead Tricia and I to change and that has led Elizabeth here, is a call that may lead you to do new things, to change your role, to lead you in a new adventure, not necessarily away, but here in the church you love, with the people that you know.

We cannot know where the call to follow will take us and that is a risk.

But Christ took a risk on the disciples and every day he takes risks on the human race, takes risks on people like you and me.

In a few moments He will invite to his table. It may not look like much, a wafer and a sip of wine, but looks are deceiving. For what is offered is nothing less than His body and blood, the very things we need to sustain us as we answer His call to follow.