

The Second Session of the Fifty-Eighth Synod

Eucharist Sermon 2026

The Venerable Peter Jenkins

Luke 5:1-11

I'm not really one for fishing, and I have certainly never made my living from it - but even so I can imagine what it was like for Simon Peter and the others to spend a night fishing without success: the disappointment, the frustration, the growing discouragement as they sensed that nothing would work - no matter what they tried.

And they must have tried everything they knew. Each secret spot on the lake, each little trick they had developed or learned over the years. But still in the morning they returned to shore with empty nets.

And then along comes Jesus, a carpenter's son, a preacher, and presumes to tell them to try again!

But note what Jesus doesn't say: doesn't suggest that they just need to be better people, he doesn't say to them that they don't know what they are doing, doesn't criticise them for forgetting Jonah's 7 principles for finding a big fish. He simply says, let down your nets for a catch.

Note also how Simon Peter responds:

"Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything... But because you say so, I will let down the nets."

"Because you say so."

Simon Peter almost certainly knew there was no point in lowering his nets again, that - after the night they had had - it would be futile.

But, because Jesus said so, he was willing to try.

I don't want to draw too close a parallel between a night of unsuccessful fishing and our gathering this evening - so please hear me when I say that I am not suggesting that Synod is an exercise in futility.

But I did want to acknowledge that recent years have been a difficult time to be in ministry. And that many of us will know the discouragement of working hard and seeing little result, know the struggle of a cycle of almost endless challenges.

We know what those challenges are because we have discussed them many times at previous synods. Things like:

- The challenge of aging and declining congregations, when more and more responsibilities get put on fewer and fewer people
- The challenge of maintaining old buildings with few resources AND the challenge of trying to do ministry when our buildings seem to demand all the attention
- And of course there is the great challenge of reaching out to our community, and particularly to younger generations, with the Good News of Jesus when we don't feel like we have the tools or the skills or the resources or the support

We know the challenges well. What we are unsure of is how to respond to them.

Now sense and intellect might say to us: well that's just the way it is, these are the times we live in. You can't fight demographics, you can't fight the trend. It's futile to try.

But the question I want to ask is this: what if God is not done with the Anglican Church just yet?

What if all our debates and discussions about the maintenance challenge, and parish structures and clergy teams haven't just been an expression of our frustration - but have been God stirring us, readying us for something new?

What if Jesus is preparing to ask us to let down our nets once again?

The reading we heard this evening from Luke 5 marks a shift in the Gospel account of Jesus' ministry. Up until this point he has acted alone. But no longer, for now he starts to call others to join him in the work of the kingdom. That is his invitation to Simon Peter: from now on you will fish for people - in other words, come and join me in drawing people into God's kingdom.

And this work which Jesus invites Simon Peter to share in is the very work he entrusts to his disciples at his Ascension—it is the very work which the Church is empowered to carry out at Pentecost.

It is this work which we see the apostles undertaking in the Book of Acts; it is by this work that the Church grows out from Judea into Asia Minor, Africa and Europe.

It was this work of God's kingdom which then spread across Europe, as far as some small islands on its north coast, and which endured the collapse of empire, and centuries of war and plagues and dissension and reformation and counter reformation - until it travelled across to the New World and down to some small islands at the bottom of the South Pacific where it was welcomed and shared across the land.

And now we sit here, some two centuries from when it first came to these shores and some two millennia from when Jesus first called Simon Peter and the other disciples, and this work - this work of bearing witness to Christ and his kingdom - has fallen to us.

And if that seems like a challenge to us today, know that it has been equally if not more challenging many times before - that there have been many times and occasions when it might have seemed impossible, bound to fail, like an exercise in futility: and yet still the work of God's kingdom has endured.

Was that because of the brilliance of church leaders past? Because of the genius of synods and clergy of yesteryear?

Or was it because when everything went wrong, and nothing seemed to work, they heard Jesus say, let down your nets once more and - because he had told them to - they obeyed.

In this diocese we have recently begun talking about ideas of faithfulness and fruitfulness, reflecting that it is Christ who brings forth fruit on the vine and that the call on the branches is to be faithful to what God asks of us.

As Diocesan Council recently put it when establishing new working groups:

Our work is grounded in faith in the Gospel, trust in God, and hope in Christ's work.

Our challenge is to be faithful to God's call in this time and place.

We believe that our faithfulness is matched by God's fruitfulness, for fruitfulness is the work of the Holy Spirit.

Ultimately, it is God who builds the Church.

Clergy colleagues will know that a good sermon ends with a challenge or a call to action, so here it is:

If we are going to rely on Jesus, trust in him to guide us or tell us what to do, then a good place to start - the only place to start really - is to ask him. To commit ourselves in prayer, seeking his face and asking for his guidance, to make space to discern his will.

So let us be willing to ask and then be ready to obey; let us be prepared to cry out: "Lord, give us faith - tell us what to do!"; and let us have our nets ready, waiting to let them down one more time when Jesus tells us to.

Because he tells us to.

Let us pray:

Praise to you, God our hope,
for when we ask, you give;
when we knock, you answer;
when we seek, you show the way.
Praise to you for your unfailing grace.
Make us now your faithful people. Amen.