

## Choosing and Following

Luke 5:1-11 [MW19-06]

Sermon preached by Rev Wayne Thornton at Mangawhai and Wellsford, Sunday 10 February 2019

I'd like to start by asking a couple of questions

- one that I think I can give an answer to  
and one that I think only you can answer
- so, what are these questions?

When did Jesus choose you?

When did you choose to follow Jesus?

[space for reflection]

When you think about what happened in our gospel reading

- it's kind of crazy isn't it?  
there must have been something about Jesus  
for those guys to leave everything they've known, everything familiar
- and go off with this Jesus  
go off and do something they know nothing about

It's as if Jesus had said to them:

- from now on you'll be building nuclear reactors  
or, from now on you will be designing fashion beachwear
- when Jesus said they would "bring in people"  
he might as well have been speaking a foreign language!

There must have been something about this Jesus ...

- he borrows Simon Peter's boat to speak to the crowd  
then he tells them how to fish
- then Jesus chooses Simon Peter, out of all the fishermen around Lake Galilee  
so for Jesus was there something special about this Simon Peter?
- then he chooses James and John, was there something special about them too?

Just think about it for a moment

- Jesus thinks to himself: I've got a message with the potential to change the world  
but I need some help to spread it around
- I know what I'll do, I'll go down to the lake and get three fishermen  
that'll do the trick!

If right now, today, I want to start a new movement

- radical, exciting, energising  
if my desire is to motivate people and change lives for good
- will I go to the universities looking for possible candidates to help me?  
will I go to a theological college?, successful businesses?  
find inspirational teachers, look for dynamic group leaders ... ???

I could choose to do that

- or, I could choose to go down to one of the local market gardens  
find a group of half a dozen or so workers and say:  
"Follow me and from now on you will bring in people instead of vegetables"

Jesus chose Peter, James and John because there was something special about them

- this special thing was that they were 'ordinary'  
they were people you and I can identify with: they were like us
- we aren't able to say: of course they could do that  
of course they could drop everything and follow Jesus  
because they were especially gifted, talented  
or because they had such a horrible life anything would be better
- nope, they were fishermen through and through  
good fishermen, solid, reliable, fit, healthy, but fishermen none the less
- there was nothing that specially marked them out  
to spearhead a world-shattering movement

It's all about choosing and following: choosing and following

- Jesus chose Peter, James and John  
was that the 'critical moment'?
- Jesus' choice was important, but not necessarily the defining moment  
I'll explain my thinking in a bit

In Matthew's and Mark's telling of this same incident Jesus says:

- *Come with me! I will teach you how to bring in people instead of fish*

For Luke there is no invitation, no suggestion

- Jesus assumes Peter, James and John will follow  
however in each case Peter, James and John could have said:  
Thanks very much, but if it's all the same to you I'll stick to fishing.  
But hey, I appreciate your asking and best of luck
- Peter and James and John could have chosen to say that  
could have chosen to stay as they were
- Praise God they didn't!

As they stood on they lakeshore and heard Jesus' words

- Peter and James and John probably understood as much about "bringing in people"  
as I do about stem cell research
- but they still followed Jesus  
Peter and James and John chose to follow
- and that made all the difference

Why did they choose to follow Jesus?

- we can only speculate ...  
were they keen to bring in people? cross that one off  
were they bored with fishing? maybe
- did they fancy an adventure? it's possible

It seems to me there is only one thing we can be sure of: there was something about Jesus

- Jesus could have said I'm going to teach you to make martinis  
shaken not stirred, presented on a silver tray
- and Peter, James and John would have said  
okay, we're in!
- not knowing where it would lead or what would happen  
not even knowing Jesus that well ... yet

They chose to follow

- because of Jesus

I said before I didn't think Jesus choosing Peter, James and John was the 'critical moment'

- when did Jesus choose you?

Psalm 139 says:

*But with your own eyes you saw my body being formed.*

*Even before I was born, you had written in your book everything I would do*

- before you were born  
all through your life  
right now - Jesus chooses you!
- however that can't be the critical moment  
because Jesus CHOOSES EVERYBODY!

The critical moment is what happens next:

- when someone chooses to follow Jesus  
when someone chooses *not* to follow Jesus

Here's something I came across on "choosing" that I find very thought provoking:

An Arab chief tells a story of a spy who was captured and then sentenced to death by a general in the Persian army. This general had the strange custom of giving condemned criminals a choice between the firing squad and the big, black door. As the moment for execution drew near, the spy was brought to the Persian general, who asked the question, "What will it be: the firing squad or the big, black door?" The spy hesitated for a long time. It was a difficult decision. He chose the firing squad. Moments later shots rang out confirming his execution. The general turned to his aide and said, "They always prefer the known way to the unknown. It is characteristic of people to be afraid of the undefined. Yet, we gave him a choice." The aide said, "What lies beyond the big door?" "Freedom," replied the general. "I've known only a few brave enough to take it."

We know Jesus far better than Peter or James or John

- sure Jesus had stayed at Peter's house  
James and John had heard him preach and seen him around
- we know the whole story  
how it really is good news
- so we don't need to know whether it's nuclear reactor building  
designer beachwear or stem cell research that we're being invited to follow in
- we just need to know Jesus chooses us  
and gives us what we need to do whatever it is

Someone once asked me for a quick description of what following Jesus is all about

- yeah right!  
but I do have a kind of "shorthand" for this:  
being in the place God calls you to be, using the gifts and abilities God gave you

Peter, James and John seemed quite happy being fishermen

- they probably could have quite happily gone on being fishermen  
however that was not the place they were called to be
- Jesus invited them to a new place

## Choosing and following

- a new place ...

here's more 'food for thought' from writer James S. Hewett

When I was a young writer with a very uncertain income, I went into a quiet park to contemplate a serious problem. For four years I had been engaged but didn't dare to marry. There was no way of foreseeing how little I might earn in the next year; moreover, we had long cherished a plan of living and writing in Paris, Rome, Vienna, London - everywhere. But how could we go three thousand miles away from everything that was familiar and secure, without the certainty of some money now and then?

At that moment I looked up and saw a squirrel jump from one high tree to another. He appeared to be aiming for a limb so far out of reach that the leap looked like suicide. He missed - but landed, safe and unconcerned, on a branch several feet lower. Then he climbed to his goal, and all was well. An old man sitting on the bench said, "Funny, I've seen hundreds of 'em jump like that, especially when there are dogs around and they can't come down to the ground. A lot of 'em miss, but I've never seen any hurt in trying." Then he chuckled. "I guess they've got to risk it if they don't want to spend their lives in one tree." I thought, A squirrel takes a chance - have I less nerve than a squirrel? We were married in two weeks, scraped up enough money for our passage and sailed across the Atlantic - jumping off into space, not sure what branch we'd land on. I began to write twice as fast and twice as hard as ever before. And to our amazement we promptly soared into the realm of respectable incomes. Since then, whenever I have to choose between risking a new venture or hanging back, those five little words run through my thoughts: "Once there was a squirrel ... And sometimes I hear the old man on the park bench saying, "They've got to risk it if they don't want to spend their lives in one tree."

Jesus invites us all to a "new place"

- for most of us it will have little to do with nuclear reactors, beachwear or stem cells though it could at first seem as challenging and beyond our experience

- Jesus chose you from the moment of conception

Jesus chooses you right now

Luke 5:11 says

*When they had brought their boats to shore, they left everything and followed him*

What is it Jesus is choosing you for?

- and are you following up?

[time for reflection, then prayer]