**How to Be A Disciple of Christ** (Luke 5:1-11)

What is a Christian? Does being a disciple of Christ sound different? If so, how?

**Read –** Luke 5:1-11

Why did Jesus need to go out onto the sea of Galilee in Peter’s boat?

What’s “the word of God” (v. 1)?

Look up some of the following references (at least those in bold) to the phrase in Luke-Acts: Luke 5:1; **8:11, 21**; 11:28; Acts 4:31; 6:2, **6:7**; 8:14; **11:1**; 13:5, 7, 46; 17:13; 18:11. What do these verses tell us about the word of God?

Why is it important to hear the word of God?

How do we hear the word of God regularly in our lives?

What was Simon’s experience of Jesus so far (see Luke 4:38-39)?

Simon was a professional fisherman. Why might he be surprised by Jesus’ question in v. 4?

In v. 5, what reason does Simon give for following Jesus’ command?

We don’t always understand why God asks what he does. When have you obeyed God “because he says so”?

What’s the difference between how Simon addresses Jesus in v. 5 and v. 8?

What’s the significance for how Simon understands Jesus?

Jesus says “don’t be afraid” (v. 10). Luke has already used this phrase in 1:13, 30 and 2:10. Look up those verses. In each case, what is God asking them to do that’s beyond them?

What does Jesus ask Simon to do that’s beyond him (v. 10)?

How is it that he’s able to leave the life he knows behind and follow Jesus (v. 11)?

Are there things about being a Christian that feel beyond you?

What comfort does this passage bring?

**Pray –** Let’s pray that we might be hearers of the word, doers of the word, and that we’d trust God to do his will through us.

Are you a Christian? If so, what does it mean to be a Christian? What does it involve?

What if I asked whether you were a disciple of Christ? What would that involve? Does that sound different to being a Christian? If so, how?

We’ve been looking at Luke’s gospel and we arrive at chapter five today. In the first chapters Jesus’ coming is set up. Then he’s born and is baptised, tempted in the wilderness and proclaims that he’s the one on whom God has put his Spirit to proclaim good news.

In the rest of chapter four the truth behind Jesus’ announcement is shown powerfully before here in chapter five we find him calling his first disciples.

You might think of Jesus’ disciples as the Twelve. But it isn’t only the twelve. In fact, although Simon is key in this passage, he hasn’t yet been called as one of the twelve, we have to wait for chapter six for that. So in this chapter, we have an account simply of Jesus calling a disciple. A follower. Or as we would say today, a christian.

We find in these verses a pattern of calling that we clearly trace. First, disciples must hear the word of God. Second, they must respond. Third, their empowered to do more than they’re naturally capable of.

**Disciples of Christ Listen to Him** (vv. 1-3)

In the first three verses we hear about how crowds gathered to listen to Jesus. He was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, better known as the Sea of Galilee and he was teaching.

The words Luke actually uses are important to notice. Verse one, “the people were crowding around him and listening to *the word of God*.” This phrase “the word of God” is very important for Luke. Luke’s gospel is the first part of a two part work Luke-Acts. The gospel is the first half and Acts the second.

The phrase “the word of God” occurs fourteen times between the two of them but only four times in Luke. And all in the first third. Acts tells the story of how the word of God spread and grew into the early church. Here we have the first occurrence of the phrase because we’re at the very start of Jesus’ ministry of calling people into gospel work alongside him.

Two of Luke’s four uses of the phrase in his gospel are in the Parable of the Sower. A parable all about the different responses people have to the word of God. Some listen. Some don’t. Some persevere. Some thrive. But we’re not there yet. This passage is the sower sowing the first seeds. And he’s sowing them liberally. The word of God is proclaimed by Jesus to an exclusive group only but to a mixed group.

We see this forcefully in verse two and three in which we find Jesus calling on a couple of fishermen to set their boats into the water so he can preach from them. That’s how many people there were. And there would be mixed reasons for them being there.

The fisherman Jesus calls on is Simon. It’s not the first time he’s met Jesus. At the end of chapter four Jesus had healed his mother-in-law. But so far he’s seen and he’s heard Jesus. But he hasn’t been called to respond.

The start of discipleship to Jesus comes from hearing the word of God. To listening to Jesus’ proclamation “repent and believe.” And the question comes immediately to me and to you. Do you listen to the word of God?

Today the word of God is recorded for us in the Bible. And if we only hear the Bible in church, we’re not really hearing the word of God. It’s simply not enough. Whatever we may think the Christian life is all about. It starts with hearing the word. We need to respond, as we will see. But without the hearing there can be no response. Without the hearing there can be change. Without hearing the word of God the story doesn’t even begin.

If you do regularly hear the word of God be encouraged to continue. If you don’t, commit to making this a priority. It’s easier today than ever. Perhaps you struggle to read. You can listen to a Bible reading plan. I would love to help you set that up if it would help you. We all must be hearing the word of God.

**Disciples of Christ Follow Jesus’ Direction in All Of Life** (vv. 4-7)

Becoming a disciple of Christ, however, doesn’t end with hearing. It calls for action and response. Verse four, “when he had finished speaking, he said to Simon.” Remember here that Simon has been in the boat sitting right next to Jesus as he spoke the word of God. “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch,” says Jesus.

This is an interesting situation. Simon has seen how Jesus could heal his mother-in-law. He’s heard him preach repentance and trust in God. Now Jesus turns and addresses his area of expertise. Simon’s livelihood was fishing. He knew how to do it. Yet here’s Jesus giving him advice about it.

Imagine you were to meet an extraordinary doctor. This doctor knew how to fix your ailments. They knew how to give advice on how to stay healthy that really worked and was achievable. You would, of course continue to see this doctor wouldn’t you? But then, one day, you went into the doctor’s office and they said to you, “Now you’re healthy, this is how I want you to invest your money…”

You’d be forgiven for being a bit taken aback wouldn’t you? After all, a doctor deals with the body, not investments. And so you’d wonder, why should I listen to a doctor about making financial investements?

So it was with Jesus. Certainly Simon had cause to trust and respect Jesus deeply. But as a rabbi. A religious teacher. Sure, he’d seen healings as well. But fishing was his area. This is what he knew about.

How does Simon respond? Verse five, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything.” I.e., we’re tired, we’ve worked, we know what we’re doing but with no success. In short, there aren’t any fish to catch at the moment. But he continues, “But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

Because you say so. Or we could translate this, “on the basis of your word.” There’s a definite sense in which there’s little expectation of a positive outcome. But *because Jesus says so*, Simon will agree.

The result? Verse six, “they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break.” A roaring success. A call to act in faith in Jesus’ word. To act on Jesus’ say so resulted in success. A success that seemed unlikely if not impossible.

We’re called to hear the word of God and to respond. Sometimes that response will come easily and makes complete sense to us. Other times it won’t. When Jesus calls us to forgive others. It seems to difficult. When Jesus calls us to pray for our enemies. It’s counter intuitive. When Jesus calls us to forsake our sin. We want to cling to sin.

When we’ve heard the word of God we’re to act like Simon. To say with him, “because you say so.” I will do according to your word because you say so. I’ll forgive because you say so. I’ll pray for my enemies because you say so. I’ll forsake my sin because you say so.

As we hear the word of God this week. Let’s hear and respond with “because you say so.”

**Disciples of Christ Achieve More Than They Thought Possible** (vv. 8-11)

In this account of Jesus’ calling of the first disciples, then, we’ve seen that it starts with hearing the word of God and continues with acting on it. The final verses. Verses eight to eleven bring us to the final and central thought of this passage: Jesus calls us to do more than we’re capable of.

In verse eight we see Simon responding in shock, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” What’s happened? Simon’s heard Jesus’ teaching and he’s seen Jesus heal the sick and cast out demons. So what’s changed?

Notice how Simon addresses Jesus. In verse five, when Simon had great respect for Jesus he refers to him as “master.” In one important manuscript it says “teacher” and this is the sense it has here. “Master,” says Simon. Master, because he’s a teacher, a rabbi, one in authority. But once he’s seen Jesus has authority even in the sphere of fishing – something which seems less exciting to us! – when he’s seen Jesus’ authority there, he calls him “Lord.”

In the Old Testament, God’s name was Yahweh but by the time of Jesus God’s name wasn’t pronounced and so instead of Yahweh the reader said ‘Lord.’ What this shift in title indicates is that Simon realises that Jesus isn’t simply a teacher, healer, or miracle worker. Simon’s beginning to realise the truth that in Jesus God himself was coming to his people. Simon’s getting the first glimpses that this Jesus is the Messiah.

And so, he worries that he’s not ready. That if God himself comes, he’s simply not worthy. Verse nine, “all his companions were astonished,” or literally, “amazement encircled them.” They realised that Jesus’ authority was a broad and deep as it was powerful.

Into this fear, Jesus speaks, “Don’t be afraid.” A phrase well known from God’s appearences in the Old Testament. A phrase also used in Luke when the angel appeared to Zacharia, when Gabriel appeared to Mary, and when the angels appeared to the shepherds.[[1]](#footnote-1)

In each of these instances God was appearing to call people to do something beyond themselves. Zecharia and Elizabeth would have a baby in their old age. Mary would have a baby without a husband. And the shepherds would come to the king despite their low status.

And now, says Jesus to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.” The phrase fish for people means to “capture people alive.” It would be used when you captured a prisoner in war without harming them or when you hunt an animal but you want to keep them alive.

So here, Jesus is talking about something very difficult: winning people into his kingdom. Not harming them, not destroying an enemy, but releasing people from bondage to a foreign power.

Who of us here can’t sympathise with Simon? Here he is, a lower-middle class fisherman. Hard working but not exceptional in the world. And Jesus says that he’ll take part in his mission of bringing people into his kingdom. A mission quite beyond his own power.

Yet because of the one speaking they can, verse eleven, pull their boats up on shore leave everything and follow him.

**Conclusion**

Are you a disciple of Christ?

Perhaps you’re not really sure what that question means. You wonder who is Jesus really and what a disciple is. The message for you today is that you must hear the word of God. Being a Christian is based on God’s call to each one of us in Christ. It’s not simply a feeling, a blind faith, or wishful thinking. Though this is how the world wants Christianity to be seen. It isn’t about that. The word of God is an objective message we need to hear before we can respond.

That may not be you. You may know the word. You may know what Christ’s claim on your life means. Yet you haven’t done anything about it. You hear, but don’t do. If that’s you, then you’re called to act. Hearing in the Bible means doing. Otherwise we haven’t really heard. It may be that we resist because we don’t understand why Jesus asks us to do all he asks us to do. Let’s follow Peter’s example of hearing the word of God and doing “because he says so.”

Perhaps for more of us, we hear and wish to obey Jesus. We want to be disciples. But we just don’t feel capable. We want to cry out with Simon, “I am a sinful man.” Take this passage to your comfort. Hear Jesus’ ‘do not be afraid’. The do not be afraid that called John the Baptist from a barren womb. The do not be afraid that called the shepherds to kneel beside the king. The do not be afraid that called Mary to be part of the impossible. It’s the same God, the same do not be afraid that addresses you this morning and says, “you will fish for people.”

The callings high and hard. But fix your eyes on the one who calls and he can and will do more than we can ask or imagine.

1. Luke 1:13, 30; 2:10 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)