Now I don't know how long it would take you to explain how you ended up in the job you're doing now or what you're doing in Switzerland, but if you were to ask one of the men on one of these two boats why they ended up as Jesus' disciples, it wouldn't take long before they started talking about this day when Jesus took them fishing. This incredible event takes place at the lake of Genesaret, which you'll know better as the Sea of Galilee. And for these men this meeting with Jesus doesn't come out of the blue. We know from the other gospels that they've already interacted with Jesus. But this is where Jesus calls them to the work He's got for them. This is where He calls them to the task of fishing for men.

And you don't have to think long about this event before you realise that Jesus has set the whole thing up. You see He doesn't come up with this great catch of fish just to bless these hard-working fishermen who've been up all night with nothing to show for it, and having performed the miracle as a kind of 'this will make you feel better' gift then thinks, 'hey that makes a great sermon illustration, that makes a great object lesson, listen in boys, I want to tell you about becoming fishers of men'. No, this whole episode, which for all of them will be indelibly printed on thier minds as to how they ended up following and serving Jesus, is designed by Jesus –from beginning to end - to show them how to be fruitful and faithful as his followers.

And what's true for them is true for you and me as individuals and as a church. This whole episode is Jesus saying to them, and through Luke to us, – Men (and those of us who come after them) there is a great catch of fish to be landed, there is a great harvest to be reaped of men and women who don't know the truth of God's love and grace, who don't know about the Kingdom of God, and I'm calling you to help land that catch. But if you are to be fruitful and faithful, here's what you need to do.

And church, as we look to start the evening service in two weeks, I am struck by the timeliness of what God has to say to us from this passage this morning.

1. Teach them the Word of God

Now Jesus is getting popular, He's like a rock-star rabbi, and the crowd, Luke says in v1, are 'pressing in on him'. And they were pressing in on Him 'to hear the word of God.' That's what they were coming to him for. We saw that last week in Luke 4: how people were astonished at Jesus' teaching. And now they're pressing in on Him to get more of it. It's as if they were hungry for it.

Seven hundred years before this the Old Testament prophet Amos had said (8:11) 'Behold, the days are coming,' declares the Lord God, 'when I will send a famine on the land – not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord.' And now, with Jesus on the scene, that famine was ending and people were being fed again.

And as the crowd press in on him, he gets into Simon Peter's boat and as one commentator has put it, Jesus uses Peter's boat as a pulpit, and He starts casting the net of the gospel out over the crowd, teaching and explaining the word of God to them.

Now, in the weeks and months and years to come, as Peter and the others reflected on what it meant to fish for me, none of this would have been lost on them. Peter would have had this picture of Jesus fishing for men from his fishing boat. And when in v10 Jesus says to him 'from now on you will be catching men' Jesus uses a verb which means to catch alive, to take alive. Jesus doesn't mean trapping people with some hook hidden in a tasty bit of bait and then reeling them in and gutting them and using them and consuming them like fish. He means catch them, take them alive, rescue them in the saving net of God's grace by teaching and explaining the word of God to them, just like you saw me doing.

Now if these people were starving for that in their day, how much more true is that today, when people are emaciated for lack of truth? When people don't have a clue that God loves them, that He sent His Son to die for them, His life for their life, that He was raised from the dead on the third day, and that by trusting Him they can know life and forgiveness and salvation. People don't have a clue about that. But if you take a starving man, and give him a feast, you may well kill him. You've got to slowly re-grade him to food. And so for you and me, with friends and neighbours, and colleagues and fellow students who don't God's mercy and grace, whose concept of sin and judgment and holiness and love and forgiveness are warped by what they hear and see in the media, this is going to take patient, committed, faithful explaining and teaching God's word, that may at times feel more like drip-feeding a baby with a pipette of milk, than setting a four-course dinner before them. But if you love them and are committed to them for the long-haul, you'll do that.

However it's done, to be fruitful and faithful, we need to be teaching them the word of God like Jesus.

2. Obey Jesus' Commands

Jesus finishes teaching the people and He says to Peter (v4) 'Put out into the deep and let down your nets for a catch.'

Now, I don't know if you've ever felt the indignation of someone telling you you're job, but when I was a medic I used to feel it acutely, when my mother or mother-in-law would try and correct me on some medical topic– usually it was to do with vitamins - and 'didn't they teach you anything in medical school' and 'if I only you would read this article from Readers Digest which I've photocopied for you, it would all come clear', and it would take all my Christian grace not to respond.

And here is Jesus, a carpenter, telling these fishermen their job. And Peter's been working hard all night and caught nothing. The man's exhausted. And if you've ever done a night shift where nothing's gone right, or if you've been up all night with a sick child, you know what Peter's feeling like. And here is Jesus, telling Peter, go out again Peter and put down the nets.

Now who's the expert on fishing here? Peter's the fisherman, isn't he? He knows this isn't going to work. He knows the best time to fish is at night. He knows this

crowd will have scared off all the fish from within 3 miles of here. Yet listen to how he responds: v 5, and Simon answered 'Master…'. Peter calls Jesus, 'Master'. Now whose boat are they in? Peter's. Who's the fisherman around here? Peter. Whose crew are manning the boat? Peter's. Yet Simon Peter recognizes Jesus as above all that, he recognizes that Jesus transcends Peter's authority in Peter's own boat. And he submits to Jesus, even when he's tempted to think 'Jesus, I know best'.

Have you ever noticed that conversation that goes on in your heart, about it not being the right time to obey? God, what you're asking me to do, it's inconvenient right now, and there are good reasons why I can't obey. It's not the right time to do this or that, in particular Lord it's certainly not the right time to go man-fishing with this person you're prompting me to speak to. I've been up all night – or some other excuse - and I've tried it before and it didn't work then.

And the lesson Peter learns here is: if you want to be a fruitful and faithful disciple, obey when Jesus tells you to do something. Obey when Jesus prompts you to fish. Obey when Jesus calls you to act. Obey when Jesus tells you to stop. And obey when He tells you to start.

So if there are areas of your life which are guarded and protected and sealed off against Jesus, and you know you're holding out on Him, because you think you know best, you need to submit and yield and obey. You see, Jesus could have made the fish leap into the boat, and not require anything of Peter. Instead He calls Peter to act, to do something, to obey. And the blessing followed the obedience. And as attractive as his bed might have seemed that morning, Peter never regretted the decision to obey. Whether it's man-fishing or some other point of obedience, you and I can learn this much: obedience to Jesus brings no regrets.

But did you notice what Peter says prompts his obedience? Did you see what Peter bases his obedience on? It's not his feelings, or his previous experience or his own knowledge of the lake: V5 again: 'And Simon answered, 'Master, we toiled all night and took nothing! But <u>at your word</u> I will let down the nets.' That's what his obedience is based on.

Church, isn't that a prayer worth praying, and a goal worth aiming for? That we would be a people committed to teaching and explaining God's word, not just here, but out there, in our schools and universities and work places, drip-feeding where necessary. But not just teaching it, but obeying it and responding to it in such a way that a great catch of fish gets landed. May God, make us a people like that!

So fruitfulness and faithfulness in following Jesus are going to be marked by teaching God's word and obeying Jesus' commands, but in doing so we need to expect some mess: it's the third lesson Jesus wanted Peter to learn.

3. Expect Some Mess

So obeying Jesus, they let down the nets and Luke tells us in v6 'they enclosed a large number of fish, and their nets were breaking.' And they called the guys in the other boat over and Luke says in v7 'they came and filled both the boats [with the fish], so that they began to sink.'

So just picture the scene: this catch is so great, so beyond anything they've ever experienced, that as they pull it in the ropes are fraying and the nets are breaking and their arms are aching and their muscles are straining and the boats are sinking. Now why didn't Jesus just them a nice, polite, everything-under-control, English catch of fish: where everything was all in order and respectable and Peter could have shaken Jesus' hand and said 'thank you Jesus, that's nice'?

Because sometimes God's goodness and blessing in your life may not always look like, it in the heat of the moment. You see, if these men lose their boats, their business is sunk, and yet here are their boats taking on water. And sometimes God's blessing and intervention in your life may look strangely like everything is out of control. Rather than His hand being upon you it looks like He's taken His hand off you. It may manifest itself as increased work that stretches you to the limit. And in the heat or if you're someone who thrives on work and pressure – in the absence of it, when you're sidelined for a time - you may be tempted to think: is this blessing?

And for us as a church, catching fish or catching men, God's blessing can at times seem chaotic and messy. It's not, it's just fishing time with Jesus. And while Paul says in 1 Cor 14:40 to the wayward church at Corinth 'all things should be done decently and in order' the truth is it's only grave-yards that are nice and quiet and in neat rows. And Jesus is letting Peter and us know: if you want to be fruitful and faithful, expect your quiet life to be disturbed. It's God who brings order out of chaos and He will, but there might be some chaos to start with.

So, church, if God is gracious to us and allows us to continue to grow and if we manage to pull this evening service off, and we put down our nets and God is pleased to fill them, let's expect some mess, and thank God for it.

The fourth lesson I think Jesus would have us learn with Simon Peter is Be Humbled by Grace.

4. Be humbled by grace

Luke tells us in v9 that these men were 'astonished at the catch of fish they had taken.' No doubt they'd had some good days out on the lake, but this blew any previous catch out of the water. This wasn't the one that got away, this was the catch that could set them up for life.

But note how they don't respond. They don't brag about it, or respond with a kind of Christian cockiness. Peter doesn't see this God-given blessing and feel kind of good about himself and boast about it either in his own heart or to others. Because you can respond to blessing like that and you compare it to what others aren't enjoying and think 'look how much God has blessed me' and secretly think, and how much more so than you.

But Peter's response is the exact opposite of that. He encounters Jesus' powerful grace and he responds with simple broken-heartedness: 'I don't deserve this; I'm not worthy of this grace, this blessing in my life.' For Peter this is a moment of revelation. It's a moment of revelation about who Jesus is and it's a moment of revelation about who he, Peter is. And each of us needs to get to that point of understanding. You have to come to an understanding of both who Christ is and who you are, and not get those two confused.

And Peter falls to his knees and calls Jesus 'Lord'. Before, he was simply Master, now He's Lord. It's the same word the Greek translation of the Old Testament uses for God. Now whether Peter recognizes Jesus' divinity here I doubt, but Peter knew fishing and he knew this lake and so he knew what this catch of fish entailed. And Peter knew he was in the presence of One who was sovereign over it all.

And standing before Jesus, Peter feels his heart exposed. It was as if Jesus could see into his heart just as He could see the fish in the lake. And Peter falls to his knees, he humbles himself and says, v8, 'Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.' Now, Peter hasn't got just one or even several *specific* sins in mind, like 'leave me Lord 'cos I got cross with the wife last night and kicked the dog'. No, Peter recognizes something of who Jesus is and he recognizes who he, Peter, is: a sinful man, and he begs Jesus to leave him. Why? Because in Jesus' presence and in the face of Jesus' grace, he feels totally unworthy.

But just look how Jesus responds to Peter! Jesus could have turned His back on Peter. He could have waited till they got to shore and just walked away from him. He could have said 'yeh, you're right Peter, what was I thinking, I need some holy people, some people who have got it all together, I need to go and call the righteous.'

But no! Peter says 'depart from me, I'm a sinful man' and Jesus says in v10: 'do not be afraid'. Because this isn't about judgment, it's about grace, it's about hope and a future and a calling. It's about taking a man whose every part is tainted by sin, just like all of us, and turning his life around and making him useful to the Master. And Jesus says to him: 'don't be afraid, from now on' because everything changes when you encounter Jesus, from now on, you will be catching men. It's as if Jesus says, 'you're a sinful man? no, you don't say! And I thought you had it all together Peter! If you're a sinful man, you're exactly who I've come for. Come and fish for men.'

You see, Jesus hasn't come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance. He said Himself, its not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick. And Jesus has come to take men and women who know what they are really like on the inside, who have laid aside all pretense, and who humble themselves before His grace, and make them fruitful and faithful in His service.

The fifth and final lesson I think Jesus, through Luke, would have us learn from this episode is:

Value Jesus Above Everything Else
In v11 Luke tells us 'And when they had brought their boats to land, they left everything and followed him.'

They left everything: their nets, their boats, this incredible catch which might have set them up for life, even their father Zebedee, to follow Jesus; because they've realized that Jesus is simply of greater value than all these other things. They realize that they can leave everything else, they can let everything else go – including God's gifts and blessings- and still be all the richer by having Christ. He is worth more than their business, He's worth more than their material prosperity, He's worth more than all this catch could have bought them; Jesus is what CS Lewis calls, 'the Supremely Valuable.'

But there was an alternative. They could have been engrossed with this catch and their future prospects, and become engrossed with His gifts to them. And that is so easy for you and I to do. We can get caught up in God's blessing on our lives – the material blessing of job and finances, the blessing of family and friends, the blessings that living in a country like Switzerland affords, and those things become the focus and we're like men playing with the fish, while Jesus walks on ahead.

No, these men leave everything else of lesser value and follow the Supremely Valuable. For you, it may not mean leaving these things behind physically, like these men did. But it does mean that in your heart these things don't hold you, they're not where your supreme value lies. You don't allow them to compete for your heart or your life, or your affections. When the choice comes between this or following and serving and obeying and treasuring Jesus, it's Jesus you treasure. Because you could pile all this other stuff up in the scales of your heart and Jesus would outweigh them all. Because God's greatest expression of His love for you, is not that He showers your life with His blessings, and you become engrossed with them, but that He gives you that which is of greatest value in the Universe, the gift that nothing else can exceed: Himself in Christ.

So if we are to be, as Peter became, fruitful and faithful fishers of men: let's teach the word of God, let's obey the commands of Jesus, let's expect some mess along the way, and be humbled by grace, and let us value Jesus above everything else. Even His gifts.