

Sunday by Sunday the Scriptures are read the length and breadth of this island. Sermons are preached, people are lead in prayer, in penitence, in praise, in worship. At one level it is part of who we are as individuals, as a community, as a society. Our Christian culture has shaped attitudes, behaviour, our legal system. While our Christian heritage has undoubtedly shaped us as individuals and as a society, by the same token, we have to ask what difference has our Christian culture made, to what extent does it distinguish us from other cultures, other societies?

That celebrated former Dean of St Patrick's, Jonathan Swift, once remarked of his own society; "We have enough religion to make us hate, but not enough religion to make us love one another." At what level does our Christian faith, our Christian practice impact upon our daily living?

These questions came to mind as I read over and reflected on our Gospel reading for today. This is a familiar story told to us by St Luke of the call of Peter. The details are well known. Jesus teaches the crowd from Peter's boat; there is the command to go out and put down nets, the large catch, all issuing in Peter's call.

It is worth reflecting on how Luke has chosen to tell this story, the way he has brought the elements together, that speaks not just of Peter's call but sets me thinking about what stage I am at in my own Christian pilgrimage.

There are four distinct stages to this story:

Jesus sees Peter.

asks Peter to pull out a little from the shore

asks Peter to pull out into deep water and put down the nets

Peter's response and call.

Jesus comes upon Peter where he is at, on his own territory. He and his companions had had a difficult night; they are exhausted after a long night with nothing to show for it. God comes to us, meets us where we are at, physically, emotionally, spiritually. There is a prayer of blessing that I would often use that God meets us in the quiet places of our heart, that he speaks to us in gentle understanding, wherever we are, however we may feel.

Jesus then invites Peter to go out a little from the shore. This is still home territory, this is where Peter feels at home – at this point, to be with Jesus, to do as Jesus asks is neither threatening or challenging. God invites us to move out a little from the shore, to move on a bit from where he first comes to us. Like Peter, we are still in our comfort zone as we are drawn into simple acts of obedience, simple acts of service.

Then Jesus asks Peter to take a further step – to go further out from the shore, to go out into the deep waters, to put down his nets for a catch. Peter's response has a tinge of weary compliance. As I say, Peter and his colleagues

have had a bad night – out all night with nothing to show for it – they are worn out. But there is something about this stranger and they go. If you think about it for a moment, Luke tells us of them going back to a place of failure and disappointment – but this time in the presence of Jesus. The situation is transformed – a catch beyond their wildest expectations.

This set me thinking – what is the deep place that Jesus calls us to go out into? Maybe it is a place where we have been before and failed; maybe it is a place where we have been hurt. Maybe it is a place where we are afraid to go. Maybe it is a place we have refused to venture into. A place, a situation where we have tried to serve, have tried to be faithful and we have failed – we have come back emotionally and spiritually bruised. A task we feel we ought to do and yet are afraid to – afraid we would fail, afraid we would hurt ourselves in the process, hurt others. Jesus is there – ‘Come on out into the deep.’ Then of course the call is not to go out alone into the deep, it is a call to go out in the presence of Christ; in the presence of one who can work through even our most abject failures and weaknesses; who can calm our fears, who can make up what is lacking in our service.

As I have read the story this week, I have come back again and again to Peter heading out into the deep, against perhaps his better judgement. Having gone he discovers the difference the presence of Jesus makes – a place of failure and disappointment is transformed. In words reminiscent of Isaiah in our first

lesson, he is suddenly aware of his own weakness and inadequacy and he experiences his own call to follow.

Maybe this week is a week we are spending a little off shore, in the simple tasks of service and obedience that Jesus places upon us in our ordinary day to day discipleship. Or maybe we are being called out into the deep – a broken relationship that needs healing, a hurt that needs confession or forgiveness, a task that needs to be tackled – we are wary of heading out, of getting out of our depth.

May we go out this week in the knowledge that God goes with us into whatever situation, whatever difficulty – in the midst of it all may we know his presence and his peace.