

## Sermon for 6 February 2022 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday before Lent – Jane Brough

We've all heard of Fishermen's tales, no matter how many fish have been caught, no matter how big they are, there's always the one that got away. The one that got away was, of course the biggest fish of all. Everyone likes to be successful, whether at work, cooking, gardening or fishing or just telling a story.

However discouraged we may be from time to time, what keeps us going in our endeavours is the thought that next time we will do better, we will get that promotion, time the soufflé - perfectly, grow the best rose, or catch the enormous fish that got away last time.

We cannot live without hope, we depend on it. And the source of our hope is not in ourselves, or of ourselves, it is the surpassing generosity and love of God revealed in Christ Jesus.

In today's Gospel reading, we see Jesus at work, he is teaching. Then he instructs Simon the fisherman where fish may be caught, and he is proved right and the catch is huge. The disciples who had been so discouraged by their own efforts are lifted up by Jesus, this teaching is confirmed in his manifestation of God's power. So, when he calls Peter, James and John to follow him they leave everything and follow him.

As Christians, we have an over-riding task to work with Christ in building up to and spreading the Kingdom of God, this is not a task only for the "Professionals" for those who are called to leave everything and follow him into ordained ministry or abroad to foreign fields. It is a task which is part of the vocation of every Christian.

Working with Christ can seem pretty daunting and intimidating. Most of us are only too aware of our faults and failings, the habits and attitudes which prevent us being effective followers of Christ and stop us working with him. The awareness of human weakness is illustrated in each of today's readings, Isaiah, faced with the holiness of God's presence, despairs at his own sinfulness and uncleanness. In another of the set readings from 1 Corinthians 15:1-11 which we didn't hear today Paul describes himself as the least of the apostles, the man who persecuted God's church. And Peter, seeing the Lord's power, asks Jesus to leave him, so unworthy does he feel.

When we look at ourselves, with all our weakness and sinfulness, we realise how unfit we ourselves are to be Christ's disciples. To do his work. Yet each of the readings today also give us hope. Isaiah feels unclean, but God symbolically removes his sinfulness with the live coal. Paul did the Church much harm, but God's grace worked great things even through him, the church's evil persecutor. And Peter, perhaps most clearly, gives us the recipe for success, he was weak and sinful, but his saving feature was his willingness to do whatever Jesus asked "If you say so, I will do it" he said.

From the experience of Isaiah, Paul and Peter, we see the power of God. When we are sinful, God can make us clean. When we are powerless, God is powerful. When we despair, God gives us cause for hope. When we admit that alone we can do nothing. With God we find we can do all. Complete trust in the power of God, even when humanly speaking all seems lost enabled Isaiah fearlessly to speak God's word, helped Paul to convert the Gentiles to Christ, and strengthened Peter in his leadership of the early Church and in his martyrs' death in Rome.

We are weak and sinful, so we need to turn our eyes away from ourselves and lift them up to Christ. He is the one who can turn a fruitless night's work into a huge catch of fish, Christ can take a broken relationship and restore people to friendship. By ourselves, we can do nothing, but with Christ by our side, we are strong.

Is there some area of your life where you think you have failed? Invite God into that area of your life and let him raise you up. Make a point this week of encouraging someone whom you feel is without hope. Let them see Christ, our hope alive in you. Amen