St Peter the Fisherman – Whitianga
Sunday February 6th 2022

Theme: (Jesus calls the first disciples)

I runga i te ingoa o te papa, te tama, me te wairua tapu.

*In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.*

*Amen*

*(Black slide)*

We are all constantly faced with choices - large and small. Some are relatively easy to make –

*(chocolate bar)*

a bar of chocolate or a soggy tomato sandwich from yesterday? Oh – the sandwich of course!

Others are much harder and potentially life-changing. Do we move homes from where we have lived for years to an area we just don’t know much about? Most of us here have probably had to make that particular decision at least once in our lives. It can be traumatic, and usually impacts on more people than just us. The people we have not yet met, and the ones we are leaving behind.

(sailing ships)

I am still totally awed by the fact my great-great-grandparents made the choice to leave Yorkshire in 1840 and spend 6 months travelling by sailing ship to a country on the other side of the world that they knew almost nothing about. Either we, or earlier members of our families made that same choice – to come here in the hope of a better life.

(Signing the Treaty)

Thus, in spite of some wobbles in implementation, and confusing outbursts from time to time, today is the reason why we remember and acknowledge the choice made in 1842 by both the colonising English authorities, and the already in place Māori inhabitants, to establish a Treaty, agreeing to live together as equals.

(Jesus, Peter and James)

It can’t have been easy for Simon Peter, or James and John, to walk away from a life they had always known, in a village that had been their whole lives. How powerful was the charisma of this strange man who called them to follow him and leave their entire familiar lives behind? How did Jesus know these were the ones on whom he would build his entire ministry – both for the next three years, and then onwards, after he had gone?

Yes, Jesus wasn’t exactly a stranger to Simon Peter, at least. He had just been to Simon’s house and healed his mother-in-law of a horrendous headache (probably a migraine) and a high fever. So, Simon already knew Jesus was someone very special. Given the smallness of the community James and John probably also knew about that miracle. As a small digression, and a moment of wry smile on my part, consider that previous miracle on Simon’s mother-in-law, and putting it into the context of that time, rather than the 21st Century. Luke’s text reads, as soon as the fever left her “Immediately she got up and began to serve them”. Mmmm. No chance just to rest and fully recover. Back to work.

Well, moving right along. Some time after the headache healing incident, Jesus was back by the lake of Gennesaret, and Simon Peter allowed him to use his boat as a floating pulpit. Simon had been fishing all night with no success, then working from the early morning hours cleaning his nets. Most likely he was exhausted and looking forward to going home and getting some sleep. So it must have seemed a bit of an imposition when Jesus got into Simon’s boat and asked him to put out a little way from the shore. Nevertheless, Simon did what Jesus asked, then in spite of his tiredness and doubts about the next request, also took his boat out further.

(Boats with fish)

We know what happens next — nets so full of fish that they begin to break, boats so full of fish that they begin to sink. Seeing what is happening, he is totally caught by surprise. In the midst of his ordinary daily grind, and in fact, after a particularly lousy night at work, he is encountered by someone who changes everything. Amazed by the power of God displayed in the abundant catch of fish, Simon is immediately aware of his sinfulness and unworthiness. He sees the overwhelming disparity between God’s power manifest in Jesus and his own mortal, compromised life.

Although they have just brought in the greatest catch of their fishing careers, when Jesus gives them the choice of staying in their comfort zones, or stepping out into an unknown future with him, Simon Peter, James, and John leave those boatloads of fish behind and follow Jesus. Their encounter with Jesus has completely reoriented their lives.

(Black slide)

This text offers rich possibilities for reflecting on how God calls ordinary people to discipleship and mission. After all, there is nothing the slightest bit extraordinary about Simon Peter and his fishing partners. They are simple fishermen, and they are simply doing what they did every day. They are minding their own business, cleaning their nets after a long, particularly discouraging night of work, when Jesus comes along, enters into their safe, utterly normal, mundane lives and changes everything.

That’s the thing about choices. We can stay in our safe spaces, thinking things are just fine as they are, we don’t need to change; or we can step out in faith that we have been offered an opportunity to do and be something different. Not only is Jesus asking Simon and his partners to make a significant life-changing choice, he calls them as they are*.*Simon is acutely aware of his unworthiness, but Jesus is not put off by this in the slightest. He does not ask Simon to get his act together, his resume prepared, and then come back for an interview. Rather, Jesus encounters him as he is, tells him not to be afraid, (that is really important) and calls him to a new mission of catching people.

How often do we resist Jesus’ claim on our lives because what he is calling us to do seems too hard, too crazy, too costly, too impractical? How often do we avoid putting out into the deep waters of following and bearing witness to Jesus because we are convinced that we will not see any results?

Jesus’ mission does not wait until we think we are ready. We can be called right now — even in spite of our frailty, failures, and doubts, even in the midst of our ordinary, busy, complicated lives. Jesus’ word to Simon Peter is also a word to us: “Do not be afraid.” This is Jesus’ mission, and we trust that he will keep working with us and through us, “catching” others as he has caught us — in the deep, wide net of God’s mercy and love. We are asked to trust that the catch is in God’s hands, and that God’s desire is for the nets to be bursting and the boats full.

Isaiah made his choice in an instant – “Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ and I said ‘Here I am; send me’”

What would we say if we heard the same call?

Amen.