

TUESDAY COMMUNION

"Venturing into the deep"

Hymn: 128. Wise men seeking Jesus (verse 5 – fishermen)

Reading: Luke 5.1-11

Prayers:

Fishermen have a special place in Methodist mythology.

In small ports around our coasts fishermen and their families responded to the preaching of the early Methodist evangelists. Perhaps it was the direct appeal to respond to the love of God in Jesus which appealed to them.

Here were men who, day by day, set out in small boats, where every year's storm and tempest took its toll of human life.

What the Gospel offered them was the promise that our ultimate safety and well-being is within the love of God, the Lord who sails with us day by day and brings us safely to the harbour on the far side of life's sea.

In this Bible passage we meet a fisherman who will play a significant part in the story of Jesus and the early days of the Christian Church.

Jesus speaks to Peter with authority:

"Go out into the deep water....."

The deep waters lie beyond the coastal fringe. They are where often the wind howls and waters are foam, where life is tough and great demands are placed on those who go there in small boats.....

One can't help but feel that as Luke wrote down these words he was also aware that the challenge Jesus makes to every man and woman is to move beyond the shallow waters of chatter and gossip and to risk life in "the deep waters".

I watched a TV programme this week in which five people came to a monastery for a weekend and began to experience what it is like to spend time in silence.

For most of them it was a completely new experience. Their lives were so busy and even as they went about their ordinary lives there was constantly music being played.

They found it hard to be quiet, hard to be away from the distractions of daily life, hard to listen to what lies beyond the noise which we all make in the shallow waters.

Yet, as the monk said, time and again it is silence that we hear the challenging questions and the great promises that come from God.

Peter objects to going out into the depths when he has been and fished unsuccessfully.

Yet he obeys Jesus and sets out with the other fishermen and a great catch ensues, so great that their nets are nearly breaking.

Peter's response is to ask Jesus to depart because he is a sinner! His response is typical of those who have had a powerful sense of God's awesome presence.

His sinfulness isn't so much about past failure as his awareness of his own human limitation when set alongside the glory of God.....

Maybe we have known times when we almost push God away because we find it hard to live with knowledge and love that is almost overwhelming.

Yet, the outcome is that, when Jesus departs, Peter and the other fishermen follow, leaving behind their everyday lives and possessions.

Their new task will be to share with Jesus in his work of "catching" men and women to share in the life of God's Kingdom. I'm never been entirely happy with this image because it can suggest a devious catching of the unwary.

That was certainly not what Jesus intended!

The Gospel Jesus proclaimed and the Gospel we must proclaim is open and honest.

The Gospel of God's love in word and deed is not intended to entrap the vulnerable or the unwary but to give people the freedom, if they so wish, to trust him and enjoy him for ever.

Our communion is our declaration, freely entered into, that we wish to follow Jesus and to go where he leads us, offering the love of God in all that we think and speak and do.

We hear Jesus say, "Fear no more!" and go with him to face the challenges of this new day.

Amen.