

Sermon 09/02/25 James was only a snail

Luke 5: 1-11

Ernest was an elephant, a great big fellow,
Leonard was a lion with a six-foot tail,
George was a goat, and his beard was yellow,
And James was a very small snail.

Some of you may recognise the start of the AA Milne poem, the Four Friends. Perhaps not a picture of a typical church congregation, but when you are feeling a bit like James everyone else does appear to be larger, more glamorous and more talented. By the end of the poem Ernest, Leonard and George have caused quite a rumpus, and James has travelled to the end of a brick.

It happens that this morning's gospel reading is also the story that we did in Open the Book last week and I found myself in the role of Simon Peter, firstly struggling to haul nets and fish into an unstable boat, then kneeling before Jesus, begging him to leave me alone, to leave me on my brick in my familiar world. Peter did not want to face the unknown that following Jesus would throw at him. (And perhaps if he had any hint of what was to happen he would have stayed fishing). Like him I was shouting, 'Go away'.

I was wondering what would have happened to the early church if Peter had refused the call to follow Jesus. Would there even be an early church, and therefore a later church? The only reference that Jesus provided to him was a large and surprising catch of fish, but then he made it clear that Peter's future was not catching food on the Sea of Galilee, so that became irrelevant. Modern recruitment processes are unlikely to have picked him for this role. At the transfiguration he blurts out something about building tents, with the others he is afraid during the storm on the lake, and then he denies knowing Jesus. He must have felt inadequate at times. But when it mattered, when there was a church to found, he came good and showed why Jesus had called him.

Jesus made it clear. I don't want to go away. I have a task for you. You don't need to be afraid. Now is the time to get started. Peter could have said, 'But I am only a fisherman I'm staying put', but instead he and the others set off on their roller-coaster adventure as disciples of Jesus. There was something there, something about Jesus, that against all logic made Peter and his friends leave everything and follow.

We will not be called in the same way as Peter, the Jesus who stood by them and spoke directly to them, is no longer here on earth. But that doesn't mean we won't be called just that it will be in a different way, perhaps from a feeling inside or with persuasion from someone else, or even several someone elses. And remember we are not all called to leader roles, it may be more everyday. Please come and help with the toddler group,

read in church, make strange things from balloons and sticky tape in Messy church, write something for the Parish magazine. You know, because these are the requests that you have heard in church yourselves.

What do we do with that call? It is likely that we are being asked to do something we don't feel we are capable of. It could be that we feel unworthy or just unskilled. Or that we will be so far removed from our comfort zone we are scared, scared of failure. Which brings us back to James the snail. He did not dare to leave the security of his familiar brick and went no further than the end of it.

It seems sort of laughable until we are honest about some of our own actions or rather lack of them. Most of us avoid doing certain things, possibly disguising our fear, behind alleged preferences, or, and this is my specialist subject, finding ways to need to be elsewhere. If my reception teacher could remember the long struggle we had reading the first Janet and John book, the yellow one, she would be gobsmacked to find me in any role that involved actually reading.

You may now be shouting, 'Hang on a bit. Last week Rich was urging us to be patient, it will all happen in God's time. We know that humility is a good quality, and here you are telling us to leave our comfortable places, jump off into the scary unknown and get stuck in.' But, you know, the church community is one of the most sympathetic and encouraging. If everyone who had ever stumbled over a word when reading in church refused to ever do it again – we would have no readings. Usually people sympathise, pleased that they themselves did not have to tussle with Melchizedek or Philemon. In the poem James the snail borrows a compass to help him.

Everyone who stands up here or mows the churchyard or makes the tea has had a first time. And probably a time when they had to shout help because something was not quite going to plan. The church is a community a place where we act together in our worship, in our care for our churches and in our interactions outside. Like all communities we need to share the load, not in a grand sort of, 'I have an important job,' sort of a way, but more a spotting a hole and filling it way. And, yes, everyone else will always seem to be larger, more talented and more glamorous but that doesn't mean they really are. The tasks to which each of us are called are our tasks.

We all have a choice. We can be like James the snail and stick with the familiarity of our brick, avoiding any other challenge, safe within our comfort zone. Or we can slip off our bricks and set out on our adventure as part of this community. James the snail had a compass to help him, we like Peter have the Holy Spirit. We can accept Jesus' challenge to follow where he leads us. Our journey in faith will prove to be a joyous adventure.