

Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> June

Acts 12:1-11

1 Peter 2:19-end

Matthew 16:13-19

I wonder how many decisions we make each day.

hundreds I suspect.

Most of the time we are hardly conscious of making the decisions. What to have for breakfast; which friends to play with at school; whether to drive or walk to the shops; which TV programme to watch or video game to play. Whatever it might be. Most are decisions which are not of any particular long term significance. They don't have a lasting impact on us.

But just occasionally we make a huge decision; a life changing one. After which nothing is the same again. Maybe we only make such a decision two or three times in our lives.

Here in this building a couple coming to get married "will you take ..". The start of married life

Yesterday in the Cathedral as Richard was ordained "do you believe God is calling you to this ministry .. " beginning his new life as an ordained minister

And of course the disciple Peter responded to Jesus' call by the lakeside in Galilee – Follow me and I will make you fish for people.

Peter was one of the first followers of Jesus. Jesus called Peter to follow him with the promise that he would no longer gather fish, but would now gather people to become followers. He would be a great leader of the church that Jesus was establishing, helping many others to have the same relationship with Jesus that he had. And those he introduced to being friends of Jesus introduced others to have that same relationship and so on – right down to us today.

And that word relationship is important here. We often use the word follower. And yes, Peter was a follower of Jesus. We are followers of Jesus. But he was more than that – and I hope and trust we are too. Peter spent three years listening to and talking to Jesus; he became one of Jesus' closest friends. And it was in the context of that relationship that Peter developed into the person he was.

But what sort of person was Peter?

As with all saints we are tempted to believe he was in some way super-human. That his faith was far greater than ours; that his deeds were amazing and that he always walked closely with God. But that simply isn't true for Peter – nor I guess for any of the so called saints. They were all human beings with good points and bad; with strengths and weaknesses; with successes and failures.

Our gospel reading today is one of those high points for Peter. There is a debate about who Jesus is – is he the long promised Messiah, or simply another prophet? Jesus asks those closest to him what **they** think. Peter is bold enough to say “you are the Messiah, the Son of the Living God”. In response Jesus affirms Peter – “Blessed are you – this was revealed to you by my Father in heaven” – and gives his friend Peter the awesomely responsible task of being the rock on which the church – the gathering of all who will follow and be in relationship with Jesus – would be built. He gives him the symbolic keys of heaven – emphasising his role as the leader of the church. You surely can't get a greater accolade than that.

And yet, if we had continued that reading by just a couple of verses we would read about Jesus telling Peter to “get behind me Satan. You are a stumbling block to me.” Hardly a rock on which the church will be built. Peter had failed to grasp that Jesus must suffer and die for us all.

And that high – low rollercoaster seems to one Peter travels on throughout his life. He walks on the water when Jesus calls him, yet almost drowns when he takes his eyes off him; at the last supper he declares he will do anything for Jesus, yet hours later he denies he even knows him; in the garden of Gethsemane he is asked to wait while Jesus prays, yet he falls asleep.

Peter then was a very human hero. But despite his failings (or maybe because of them) he was called by his friend Jesus to do something special – not through his own strength but in the strength of the Holy Spirit.

Our lives though are very different from Peter's. What God calls us to do is very different from what he called Peter to do. So what can we learn from him?

First, we don't have to have everything sorted in our lives if we want to follow Jesus. We don't have to be perfect – or anywhere near perfect. The important thing is that we spend time with Jesus and develop our relationship with him. If we have that close relationship we will (probably very slowly) begin to live as he wants us to

live. Peter did that by physically being with Jesus; we can do it through prayer and through his Spirit.

Second, we need to remember that failure is not the last word. We will get things wrong. Again and again. There will be highs and lows. But just as Jesus reached out to Peter even after Peter had denied even knowing him, so he will reach out to us. Our mistakes and failings will be forgiven. We will be given new opportunities.

And third – really a combination of the first two – trying to live better in our own strength will not work. Its only through the presence of the Spirit of God – the Spirit of Jesus within us - that we can begin to live as he wants. Every moment of every day. Today, Wednesday morning, Thursday afternoon. Always.

For Peter the decision he made that day by the lakeside completely changed his life. Nothing was ever the same again.. Everything he did and said thereafter was in a different context and in line with different priorities because of this new relationship he had with Jesus.

It didn't – as we have seen – mean that everything he did was then right, but what it did mean was that his relationship with God – on which his whole life is grounded – was right. And since that was right, God was able to change him – to make him more like Jesus. And that can be true for us to. By our own efforts we will find it hard (or more likely impossible) to live as God wants us to, but if we are in that close relationship with him he will help us and change us.