**Matthew 4:18-22**

**The Call to Mission**

The call of St. Andrew, which we are celebrating here today is a call to mission: pure and simple. And if we are to be a church that reflects and lives out the spirit of Andrew, we too are called to a community life of mission.

Worship and mission go hand in hand as the defining features of the church community life. From the first days of the church, from the moment Jesus called his disciples, he gave them a task to do: “Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men” or, to use a more gender neutral phrase, “I will teach you how to catch people”. The task of mission and ministry is at the heart of our call.

We are drawing to a close on our formal Listening Exercise now and the PCC will soon be considering a Mission Action Plan to present as the structure for future St. Andrew’s activity. And this is a really good day for us to formally draw this part of the Listening Exercise to a close because of the mission-focus of the ministry of St. Andrew. What we will be moving on to in the next few months is defining what our mission should be at St. Andrew’s.

We have filled out the questionnaires, we have all offered our thoughts and opinions. I have had more than 120 individual conversations with you over the last five months, groups have met, Committees have been in dialogue. A great deal has been said, and now the task is for us to pull all that information together and define what our mission should be for the coming few years. By the 14 December at the latest, I will have produced a fairly sizeable document that will be available in paper copy and on the website with my initial thoughts after 6 months of being here and hearing all that has been said through the Listening Exercise. After that, a draft Mission Action Plan will be considered by the PCC in January and formally ratified in February. On 1 March, Archdeacon Luke Miller will be with us at the 10.00 service to formally launch our Mission Action Plan.

But if we want to define mission, we must recognise it not as something we *do*. Instead, mission is what we *are*: the identity of the church is to be a people of mission. Our worship, our work, our community involvement, everything we say, everything we do should point people to the love of God revealed through Jesus Christ. It is for that reason that the Mission Action Plan, and the 5 Marks of Mission will feature so prominently in the thinking and decision-making of St. Andrew’s.

And in this passage that we heard from Matthew’s Gospel, Jesus called his first disciples, including Andrew, to the life of mission alongside him using those words that contain this most incredible promise: “Follow me, and I will teach you how to catch people”. Here were Simon and Andrew – fishermen - being called to keep fishing but with a different catch in mind. What can we learn from this passage and their call, which will help us as we think about our own call as a church at this stage of our community life?

**1. Fishermen must have perseverance**

There is an interesting turn of late in terms of youth work amongst young men in that fishing has become a really popular activity. I suppose it stands in complete contradiction to the fast pace of life that they normally lead. Fishing provides a moment to stop, and be still and reflect on life in a calm surrounding.

Not that this mirrors exactly the experience of these first fishermen called to be disciples of Jesus. Their life was not spent sitting on the peace and quiet of a riverbank but in the frantic, dangerous, physically-exhausting environment of the deep sea trawler.

But whether on a riverbank or on a trawler, the common experience of all fishermen is the need for considerable patience and perseverance. There are times when the catch will be good, there are times when the catch will be bad. There are times when it seems the nets will break for being so full, there are times when it seems the sea has no fish at all. And yet a fisherman must keep going: back out to sea every day, regardless of the weather, waiting for the catch of the day - never fully sure whether this will be a fruitful or a barren trip to the water.

And the same will be true for us as we seek to develop as a Mission-Shaped Church. We will need perseverance. We are convinced of our call to mission - but it won’t be easy; there will be rough waves along the way. So we need to persevere, confident that we are walking in the way of obedience to the call of Christ.

And as that happens, there will inevitably be a process of refining as God asks us – or maybe even forces us – to reconsider what is important in the life of our community together. We are facing many difficulties at the moment. Some people who have played key leadership roles over the years have moved away. We are in a serious battle against a dire financial situation. We are having to reorganise the frameworks of how we structure our corporate life. We even have no building to worship in right now! I believe – and I know some others do too – that this is a moment of refining: we are having to consider afresh what this community is all about; what is the heart of who we are and what we do? Are we a comfortable community in a lovely building enjoying privilege and friendship, or are we a worshipping, missional community, following bravely in the footsteps of Christ in forsaking our comfort and our privileges in a desire to spread the Gospel – live the Gospel – in the wider community?

Perhaps we are currently being stripped back, refined by God, so that we can remember together what is important, what the heartbeat of St Andrew’s is and then develop a Mission Action Plan from out of that…

Fishermen need perseverance.

**2. Fishermen need courage**

As an ancient fisherman’s prayers says: “My boat is so small and the sea is so large”. Fishing is a dangerous business – a physically dangerous business. There are many places in the world today where mission is a physically dangerous business and we have become increasingly aware over the last twelve months of the very serious persecution that our brothers and sisters face around the world. This level of persecution is moving ever closer to our own shores and we cannot afford to be complacent about what it may mean for us, as the years unfold, to profess openly a faith in Jesus Christ.

Again – the refiner’s fire…

We are becoming increasingly aware that mission can be emotionally and spiritually dangerous because we are in the business of pursuing the truth and leading others to the truth - and that is not always popular. There are times when, in the pursuit of the Gospel, we need to have the courage to stand against the mainstream of ideas and hold to a different ideal, a different path.

That was true of the fishermen in this story, of course: to be obedient to Christ’s call, they had to take a different course in life and I am sure they would have faced the anger, perhaps ridicule, of family and friends. But they were courageous – and they went the way of Christ.

It is also true, of course, that Jesus Christ himself is our role model in acting out of courage in response to a call to mission. The Father sent the Son and the Word became flesh - and he knew what it was to be subjected to ridicule and misunderstanding, to unwarranted and anger and, in the end, life-denying hatred - all because he had the courage to remain obedient to the call of the Father’s mission.

As we move forward into God’s future at St. Andrew’s, so we will need courage to pursue that future.

Fishermen need perseverance. Fishermen need courage.

**3. Fishermen need an eye for the right moment**

The fisherman knows that there is a time to cast the net and a time not to cast the net. A wise fisherman knows that he must choose the moment.

The same is true for mission. There is a time to speak and a time to be silent. There is a time to engage and a time not to engage. There is a time to talk and a time to listen. Wisdom is found in realising the moment and going with it.

As I stressed right at the beginning of my time with you at St. Andrew’s, mission is not all about Proclamation and words. Certainly, proclamation is part of mission - but, as we will learn in our striving to be missionally balanced at St. Andrew’s, there are also 4 other Marks of Mission that stand alongside the 1st Mark of Mission, which is to Tell the Gospel.

Mission is essentially a strategic activity and, as a church, we must be constantly updating and developing our approach to mission to ensure that we are not using yesterday’s activities to meet today’s needs. Society changes. Communities change. St. Andrew’s Church is changing. It will change whether we actively seek that or not. Enfield is a changing community. We live in a changing world. We need to ensure that our Mission Action Plan is a living document, not just a file gathering dust on the PCC bookshelf.

Fishermen need perseverance, they need courage. Fishermen need an eye for the right moment and to respond strategically.

**4. Fishermen must keep themselves out of sight**

If a fish sees the fisherman, it may not take the bait. Even a shadow cast across the water can have a negative effect.

And this is a real challenge to us, of course. Because, as we move forward into God’s future, we must remember that this is God’s church and this is God’s mission. We must be absolutely sure not to leave the imprint of ourselves - our preferences and even our egos - on the shape of this church. In terms of the shape and characteristic of mission, we are to become invisible so only God is visible to others.

That is a tough call – it is far from easy. But it is at the heart of successful mission activity

Jesus says, “Come with me and I will teach you how to catch people”. This is at the heart of our discipleship life together. We are called to be a community of mission. And there are four characteristics we must develop as we seek in the next few months to implement our Mission-Action Plan. We must develop Perseverance. We must develop Courage. We must recognise that this is the Right Moment – God’s Moment. We must seek to make ourselves invisible so that all eyes are focussed on the love of God, revealed through Jesus Christ, who is the author of our salvation. Amen.