

Peter's Eureka Moment (Luke 5:1-11)

What does Peter do when Jesus enables a massive catch of fish? Does he employ him as a new business partner? No! He falls at Jesus' knees. Peter has realised something profound about Jesus and himself. Now his life will be transformed.

Eureka!

In about 250BC, a Greek mathematician called, Archimedes was having a bath. As he sat in the bath he noticed that the more of his body was in the bath, the higher the water level was in the bath. Suddenly, he realised something profound: the volume of an object will push up the same volume of water. He had discovered a way of measuring volumes!

He famously shouted, *Eureka!* which is Greek for I've found it. Apparently, he was so excited that he jumped out of the bath and ran around the streets telling everyone - even while he was still naked!

Ever since, whenever someone realises something profound, it is called a *Eureka* moment. You may have had the experience yourself, you've spent ages trying to solve a problem, perhaps a crossword clue or some other kind of puzzle. You keep thinking about it and it as though your thoughts are blocked by a kind of damn. Then suddenly the damn breaks, the solution comes to you. What had seemed so hard to work out is suddenly obvious.

For Simon Peter, the first person that Luke's gospel tells us decided to follow Jesus, there was a similar kind of *eureka* moment when it came to Jesus. Suddenly, he realised something about Jesus that was profound and important and his life was never the same again.

Of course for anyone to become a Christian they need to realise these same things about Jesus. For most people the realisation is perhaps a slower process with many small steps. What matters is not the speed or suddenness about the realisation, but the fact that the realisation happens.

So what was Peter's Eureka moment. What did he come to realise? Well he came to realise something about Jesus, something about himself and something about his purpose in life.

Peter's Eureka Moment about Jesus!

We need to be clear that this was not Peter's first meeting with Jesus. In John's gospel we are told about an earlier encounter with Jesus and even in Luke's gospel in the previous chapter we are told that Jesus had stayed at Simon Peter's house and even healed his mother in Law.

As chapter 4 makes clear, Peter would have already been amazed by Jesus along with everyone else. For Peter, Jesus was already someone that provoked amazement, excitement and respect.

Clearly, here was a man of God who could help people in amazing ways. His powerful teaching showed that here was someone you could come to for advice about life and knowledge of God. His authority over evil spirits showed that here was someone you could come to for help with spiritual oppression. His power to heal showed that here was someone you could come to when you were ill to be healed.

Peter along with the crowds already realised that Jesus was someone who could help you in these profound spiritual ways. That is why he was happy to let Jesus use his boat to preach from, while he and his fellow fishermen sorted out the nets after a hard night of unsuccessful fishing.

Yet, in what happened next, Peter had a eureka moment and came to see something more profound and earth shattering about Jesus.

When Jesus finished preaching, he told Peter to get into the boat and to put the nets into the deep water. Here was a preacher telling a fisherman how to fish! Peter points out to Jesus that this is a stupid idea. After all they had been fishing all night and not caught anything, why would they catch anything now?

More than that, the fishing nets were designed to be used at night, because the fish could see them in the day time. Peter knew how to fish, he knew that what Jesus was telling him to do was a waste of time. Yet, he was impressed enough by Jesus to at least play along and do what Jesus told him.

Then something amazing happened. The nets started to fill up. In fact they filled so much they were beginning to break. There were so many fish they had to call over the other boat to help them and before they knew it, both boats were so full of fish they were in danger of sinking!

Yet, although it looked like the nets were breaking and the boats sinking, what happened was that something inside Peter snapped. He had a sudden realisation of something profound about Jesus. So much so that he fell at Jesus's knees and begged him to go away!

On the Apprentice, Alan Sugar decides each week to fire someone that he has decided he does not want to go into business with. In the end he is left with one person who will become his business partner and help him make money. A lot of people see Jesus as a potential partner to help us with some aspects of our life. That is the way the people around Peter were seeing Jesus - here is someone that can heal me, or teach me or cast out demons from me.

If Peter still saw Jesus in that way, then this miracle would have been proof to him, that Jesus was worth hiring as the ideal business partner! Just think how Peter's fishing business would have grown if Jesus could do the same trick every week!

Yet, for Peter the master fisherman, Jesus's authority over fishing showed him that Jesus was in charge of every aspect of life, even those aspects that Peter still thought was his expertise.

Rather than someone he might hire to help him with aspects of life. Here was the person who had the power to hire and fire from life itself! Jesus was the ultimate judge of all. It was Jesus who was in the position of Alan Sugar, not Peter!

No wonder this realisation made Peter so terrified he was begging Jesus to leave him alone.

- Have you come to realise who Jesus really is? Many people today think of Jesus as a great person to turn to for help in their life. Here is someone with words of wisdom, here is someone to call on in prayer when things are tough.

They come to church, when they think they are in a stage of life where knowing Jesus is helpful for that aspect of life, but when life moves on to the next stage, they move on from Jesus.

Yet, true discipleship, true faith recognises that Jesus is far more than a spiritual help or guide. He is not someone we choose to help us with some parts of our life, he is Lord over every part of our life. True discipleship accepts that Jesus is Lord, that God is rightfully in charge and following him is an eternal commitment not just something to do when it seems to suit us.

Peter's Eureka Moment about Himself!

Yet, as Peter realised this about Jesus, he realised something equally profound about himself. He fell at Jesus's knees and cried out, 'I am a sinner!'

After the 'I am Mark' event a couple of weeks ago, some of us stayed behind for a question and answer session with Stefan Smart, the man who performed 'I am Mark.' Someone asked him how he became a Christian. For him it was a kind of eureka moment in some ways like Peter's. His girlfriend at the time had said that she wanted to start going back to church. Stefan did not really believe in God, but provoked by his girlfriend and alone in his room one night he decided to 'speak to the ceiling,' just in case God was really there. He started telling 'the ceiling' about his day. But as he did so, something odd happened. Stefan started becoming aware of all the bad things he had done that day, in a way he never had before. Then he became more aware of the bad things he had done in his life up to that point. It was as he spoke to God that he became more deeply aware of his sin and brought him to tears. Not long after he became a Christian.

Peter was a Jew and would have had a strong sense of right and wrong and an understanding of sin. In fact there is nothing to suggest that he was a particularly bad person, certainly no worse than anyone else and probably from what we read in chapter 4 a respected member of the Synagogue (the Jewish church community). Later on in chapter 5, Jesus is accused of hanging out with 'sinners' and tax collectors by the religious authorities. There the reference is more to those who were disloyal to God's people and working for the Romans for money and probably involved in the kind of Roman 'partying' lifestyle looked down on by any good Jew.

So, up to this point, Peter probably thought that he was a basically good person, who had done nothing particularly bad and was better than most. The kind of attitude that is fairly common today.

Yet, when he realises that Jesus is the 'Lord', the one who is judge of all, he suddenly becomes acutely aware of his own sinfulness. When measured against others, he was good. When measured against the purity and standards of God, suddenly his wickedness became all too clear! So much so that he feels too ashamed to be in Jesus's presence.

But, Peter has moved from one false understanding to another. From a complacency about his sinfulness to a feeling that his sinfulness means that he is unacceptable to God. This too is a common attitude today. It is equally wrong.

Jesus's response makes this clear. He simply says to Peter: 'Do not be afraid! From now on...' Jesus does not deny that Peter is a sinner, neither does he accept that this means he is unacceptable to God. In fact a bit later in chapter 5 in response to the religious leaders' criticism of him hanging out with 'sinners' he says:

"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." (Luke 5:31-32)

- Peter's eureka moment about himself and Jesus's response show us how radical is the Christian way of thinking about ourselves. Today's society focuses on the importance of 'self-esteem', which seeks to reject any negative thinking about ourselves. This is right in the sense that to focus merely on our failings is destructive. Yet, it either leads to a kind of arrogance and pride, which is equally destructive or can too easily crumble at moments of failure or rejection.

The realisation about ourselves as disciples of Jesus is profoundly different. We realise that:

Jesus does not want us to think we are acceptable,

but to know that we are accepted.
Jesus does not want us to think we are good enough,
but to know that we are loved enough.
Jesus does not want us to think we are all right,
but to know that he makes it all right.

Such an understanding guards against pride and arrogance, but also despair and discouragement.

It also enables us to grow and change into better people.

It stops us being thinking we don't need to change, so that you just carrying on with the same old sins.

Neither does it leave us despairing about how bad we are so that we give up, because we know we are still accepted by Jesus.

Peter's Eureka Moment about His Purpose!

So, Peter has realised that Jesus has ultimate authority and that Jesus calls sinners, of which he is one. Yet, now Peter comes to another eureka moment. This time it is about his purpose. Jesus says to him:

"Do not be afraid! From now on you will fish for people!"

I was listening to a podcast recently about 'scaling up.' That is how to take a successful business like a restaurant and turn it into a chain of restaurants. Often such ventures fail. Why? The issue is why the initial restaurant is successful. If it is successful because it has a fantastic chef, then when you create a chain of restaurants, they won't all have fantastic chef's and so they will fail. However, if the restaurant is successful, because of the menu and the ambience created, despite having a mediocre chef, then it is possible to change it into a successful chain of restaurants, because these things can be copied. So, the secret to testing whether a restaurant can be turned into a chain of restaurants is to make sure that you only employ a mediocre chef in the first place!

That is a great insight from a top 21st century economist. Jesus, however, knew this 2,000 years ago. When Jesus came to select his first disciples, he did not choose people from among the religious experts of the day. He chose a rather mediocre ordinary banned of disciples. The fact that these very mediocre people like Peter, could set up churches successfully, showed that its success was not down to the quality of the missionaries, but the quality of the message.

So, what does qualify Peter to the role that Jesus is calling him to? Not his Biblical knowledge or his academic ability, but the realisation about Jesus's authority and that he has come to call sinners, of which Peter is one.

It is knowing these things that equips Peter to fish for people! You can't call people to accept Jesus as Lord and saviour, unless you've come to realise that he is your Lord and saviour. But, knowing these things also helps us to understand why the command to fish for people or catch people for Christ is so necessary.

There are three points I think we need to grasp from Jesus's call to Peter.

1. Firstly, this is also the call to our church today. When the church forgets that part of its essential character is to catch people for Christ, then it has lost something fundamental. As Emil Brunner says, "The church exists by mission as fire exists by burning." Praying for and

seeking to call people to be true disciples of Christ must be a fundamental priority of our church life.

2. Secondly, we should not feel that we are ill-equipped for the job or that it is only possible if we have the best leaders or preachers. Jesus called people of mediocre ability to the role precisely to show that it can be achieved by people of mediocre ability - as long as they have grasped who Jesus is and that he calls sinners like you and me!
3. Thirdly, we should not let past failures put us off. Jesus calls Peter to fish for people, having just helped him to a phenomenal catch of fish after a night of abject failure. We may look at our churches and see a recent history of steady decline. That does not mean that God will not suddenly fill the nets and boats once more. Like Peter, we may feel that going out again is a waste of time, but let us do it anyway and see if God might not surprise us!