St Peter and St Paul - 29th June 2025

2 Tim 4: 6 - 18

Luke 5: 1-11

When I was about 10 we went to the Lincolnshire coast for a summer holiday - Skegness, ooh, its so bracing! It has miles and miles of flat sand, and the weather was good. I remember that my brothers French exchange student, Philippe, was with us as well. One day me and him were playing in the sea, in the waves and the foam, and I guess I must have tripped on a rock or something, becuase I fell down, just at the wrong moment - as a wave crashed over my head. I was held under water by the force of the wave, but I'm a strong swimmer, I spent so much of my life in water I wasn't afraid, I just thought - oh - wait until the wave has gone, and get up.
Except, what happens after a wave breaks is that the next wave has an undertow - the water pulls back, and the force was too strong - I couldn't push against it, or get up. Ok, wait for that to pass Simon, then get up. But of course, what happens then is that that wave crashes on me - with force. Keeping me down. And then the undertow keeps me under, and again and again. I don't know how long it was, but eventually I feel Philippe grab my arm and pull me out of the sea, back into the fresh air, and life.

So… I'm telling that story to help us think about stories.
I wonder where you went to - were you remembering beach holidays you'd been to? Or French exchange students? Were you worried when I was stuck under the waves (even though you know I survived). Were you feeling what I was feeling?

Now how would it be if I then said - the moral story of that story is… Never swim alone, or the sea is dangerous? Or any other number of lessons you could draw from it.

That might be true, but its not really the point of the story, or the story might have many points depending on its context, or where you are in your life when you hear it, or your experience.

You see stories invite us to join in - to engage with our minds, with our imagination, with our hearts, for some of us to have pictures in our heads.
And they are full, full, full, of meaning, layers of meaning, of symbolism and mystery.

I want to talk about stories today.
Especially stories in the bible.
Its chock full of them - Moses, David, Elijah, Nehemiah, Jesus, Paul and his shipwrecks and travels.
The book - is a collection of 66 books,
And together they make up teh story of a people, the Israelites, and their God, and the story of the human race and God, and Jesus and people.

Wonderfully, as well as the highs of their national and spiritual life, it also contains lots of mistakes, disasters, embarrassing or downright wrong things that happened too.

(Just for one - Jonah - go and preach to Nineveh - No way - get swallowed by a whale then!)

And although its got a back cover on it, it doesn’t really have an end. Its not like a film - all wrapped up. (I know Revelation does talk about the end, but its not exactly clear is it? Its like that weird bit in the film where the director thought they'd do something arty - and it all goes out of focus and backwards soundtracks.)
The actual story of God and his people is more like the Archers - it goes on and on. Characters come in and go out - God and the Grundy’s - remain.

You know I was 25 when I discovered that the story of Jesus didn't end at the resurrection!! Did you know it doesn't end there - have you read teh book of Acts?

And even outside the bible - the story goes on - you can read about Polycarp - Bishop of Smyrna in 160 AD, Eusebius, Iraneus, Clement, Ignatius -

And these amazing people lived very Christian lives - most of them were killed for being Christian - and yet there was no bible!

Some who want to base christianity on the bible.
Which begs the questions, as the bible was only put together in 325 AD - what did the early Christians base their life and belief on?
Well I'll tell you - the same as the Church of England is based on now -
Scripture - yes
But also Tradition and Reason - all 3 working together.

What we know of Clement or Polycarp - or Peter and Paul
Is from tradition, more than the Bible.

Paul was beheaded by Nero, in Rome
It is Clement, Ignatius, Iraneus who say that Peter was in Rome - again killed by Nero - crucified head down according to Origen.

That does not make it wrong or useless.

So stories - our sacred text is full of them. Some of them you might take literally, concretely, some you might you might see as more allegory. The book of Revelation seems to me to be a book full of symbolism, and that we are meant to understand that the Beast with 7 horns - is not a literal beast with 7 horns, but may stand for Rome, or even just the way that evil has many ways to attack, etc etc.

And if our sacred text is full of stories - that should tell us something about how to use it.

It is not written like a rule book.
(Although of course it has lots of wisdom, and good advice)

Its not written like systematic theology - you will not find a verse that says - God is three and one, father, son and holy spirit.

Its a story - we share, we discuss, we inhabit.

Stories invite relationship - to the characters
Emotion to the plot
Things that give us life.
If faith is just a list of do's and don'ts - its boring, its hard to do, and its not about relationship with God. Connecting with God.

The best preacher I have ever known - just told stories of Jesus, and the book of Acts or the old testament - in a way that brought them alive. That made me feel something.

Some of the worst preachers I've heard..
No.. I'm not doing that!

Stories open up and give life…. So I want to tell you a story I thought and prayed about for a day on my silent retreat.
Its the story of miraculous catch of fish..
And when I'm done, I will you give some space to think -
- where are **you** in this story,
- what jumps out.
- How might God be speaking to you..

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