

TFTD Lent 2025.06 Tuesday March 11th
Awesome! ... Luke 5.1-11



When Simon Peter saw the catch of fish, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, "Get away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man!" Peter and all who were with him were astonished at the catch of fish that they had taken, and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were Simon's business partners. Then Jesus said to Simon, "Do not be afraid; from now on you will be catching people." So when they had brought their boats into land, they left everything and followed Jesus.

I recently spent a few days on a retreat at the Shrine of Our Lady in

Walsingham in Norfolk. I was struck by the atmosphere of worship in the church: clouds of incense, loads of candles, processions, bells, powerful and fervent singing (as often happens when you get a lot of clergy together!), interspersed with silence and prayer. Not to everyone's taste, I know — but it created a real sense of the awesomeness and majesty of God.

There's a moment in the service when everyone turns to face the 'Holy House' in the middle of the shrine, built to represent Mary's house in Nazareth. The original Holy House was built in 1061 in what is now the Abbey grounds, by a Saxon lady called Richeldis who had a dream instructing her to build a replica of Mary's house as a place of pilgrimage — which it was until the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, restored in the 20th century.

That moment of turning (the pews have no backs, which makes it easier) has a powerful symbolic resonance for me. It says something about the juxtaposition of the awesomeness and majesty of God with the homely world of the everyday. It was at home, after all, not in church, that Mary heard and responded to the angel's message of God coming to live amongst us in the everyday. Holding those two things together I think is very important.

Raphael's painting of the call of Simon Peter powerfully captures Peter's sense of awe and majesty at Jesus' presence, coupled with his own sense of unworthiness. But there are no priests and incense here, just a few fishermen sitting in their boats and chatting with their mates as they fettle the nets after a hard (and fruitless) night's fishing. And then this bloke comes along and says, "Hey, mate, mind if I use your boat to talk to these guys? The crowd's so big I can't make myself heard!"

So he comes on board and says his stuff, and then turns round and says, "Just put out into the deep there, and you'll find a shoal of fish." Bit cheeky, thinks Simon, telling a fisherman how to fish, after working at it all night and finding nothing! But lo and behold, he's right — there's the shoal, so many fish that Simon has to get his partners to help bring them ashore in the other boat.

Just an ordinary working day — just an ordinary bloke, teaching by the seashore — but Simon gets this overpowering sense of the visible presence of the invisible God, right there in his fishing boat, and suddenly he's on his knees at the awe and majesty of Jesus' presence. And then Simon is commissioned for a new task, using his fishing skills in the service of God — and given the empowerment to do it: "Don't be afraid: from now on you'll be fishing for people."

There's a pattern here, isn't there? The awesomeness and majesty of God, lifting us up out of the everyday, taking us to high and holy places — then the turning, the coming down to earth with a bump — and finding God is with us here too, at home, at work, with our mates, on our own, saying "Don't be afraid: I've got a job for you to do. Will you let me be 'down here' as well as 'up there'? Will you let me make your home a "holy house"? A place where My love is shown?"

To fill each human house with love
It is the sacrament of care;
The work that Christ began to do
We humbly pledge ourselves to share.

God bless,
Loveday

PS: click the link to the Victoria and Albert Museum to look at Raphael's cartoon in more detail.

<https://www.vam.ac.uk/articles/the-raphael-cartoons-the-miraculous-draught-of-fishes?srsltid=AfmBOoa-GHNF4hjHugLimQ8L8xS94gjVq1nNZ4dgFExmd1IYgY294oj#slideshow=85409956&slide=0>

