

Who are you in this narrative? 9-Feb-25

This is one of the stories in Luke that often sparks the question -- where do I fit into the story; who am I in the story? Jesus has called his first disciples, specifically Peter, James, and John – highlighting the life-changing moment when they, having worked all night without success, respond to Jesus' unexpected command to throw their nets in the deep water once more. We can only imagine how surprised they were to find their nets so full and heavy they needed help to bring in the catch after a night of empty nets. I can only imagine how joyful the recipients were when they saw how fruitful the night on the water was!

So, after sitting with Jesus in the boat for a while and listening to him, then doing what Jesus asked of them, they now have a super big catch. That was when they saw and experienced the extraordinary blessing that comes when they choose to follow Jesus and his teaching. As well as being astonished by their experience, I think there had to be a lot of joy in the surprised faces because the status quo had changed. They were trusting and brave enough in Jesus to say, 'yes' I'll follow you, into the new venture and ministry you want me to do. These men aged from 13-30 in years. The average life expectancy in the 1st century was between 20 and 30. John was the youngest and Peter was the eldest. It's sobering to know that a 13-year-old is middle age and 30 is at the end of life expectancy. From what we know, their age didn't stop them from participating in what's often referred to as the Lord's work. Their work for Christ has changed the story for so many people and nations forever, because once you know something, or have heard something, you can't unknow it or unhear it. You can ignore it and forget it, but not unknow or unhear it.

As we grow older, we carry with us a wealth of experience, wisdom, and a deeper understanding of our faith and who we are now even in our twilight years. All of which form the basis of a strong foundation where our gifts and skills can serve Christ's mission and our ministry. Each time we engage in a new endeavour it leads to surprising moments of joy, in much the same way as the fishermen reacted to the miraculous catch. Even when we feel we may have reached our limits or encountered failures in the past, we can feel the joy when God still surprises us with fresh opportunities and blessings. We still throw our 'nets' into the same water and sometimes come up empty, however, Jesus' message continues to ask us to throw our 'nets' into deeper water where our catch is greater than expectations. We too can take steps into new ministry contexts, trusting that God can use us in unique ways.

When we undertake to explore new ministries or mission our trust and hope remains that through our faithfulness, and Christ's love for us we enable ourselves to connect with different communities, groups, and experiences, enhancing our joy and enriching our relationships in all directions. As we engage with people from other congregations, faiths, genders, and those in need, our encounters with them as our paths intersect have the capacity to change us. As we move in and out of various experiences, we open ourselves to the wonder to be found in newly formed relationships. The new ideas they provide allow us

to broaden our understanding from perceived knowledge to something closer to their reality. This communal aspect of ministry can keep our spirits uplifted, reinforcing our knowledge that we are part of something larger than ourselves – the Body of Christ.

The perception that we become too old to undertake God's work often stems from societal misconceptions about aging. I don't have to tell that; however, God has a different opinion. Here's why I feel I can say that with confidence. If we look at well-known people in the scriptures who have been asked to do great things even into their old age, I can name, Adam, Noah, Moses, Job, Abraham, Joseph, Isaiah and Daniel, Simeon and Anna, John. Later in history we can name: Florence Nightingale, Charles Dickens, George Handel, Mary Prince, Kathleen Lonsdale, just to name a few who were able to accomplish great things even in their old age. These examples remind us that God doesn't limit us by our age, but God looks what's in our hearts and our willingness to serve, regardless of how many years we have behind us.

As we age, we will continue to have many opportunities to experience joyful surprises in our missional experiences. Through continuing to engage in our mission as we take steps to further cement our connection to our local community, we at our fingertips the capacity of drawing on our life experience, nurture new and lasting relationships, and embrace God's calling without the constraints of age. By casting our 'net' deeper into our community, we are acting on Jesus' call to go deeper and wider into our community. If your life is a more sedentary life, your church family will appreciate your prayers for them as we are continually seeking God's wisdom, Christ's guidance, and the Spirit's leadership.

Every new endeavour holds the potential for gratitude and grace as we discover how God uses us, renewing our spirits as we witness God's work in and through our lives.

I simply ask for us to boldly step into God's plans, confidence that we are never too old to fulfill God's purpose in our lives. So, where do you fit into Luke's story today?

Are you in the boat with Jesus, listening to him, and doing what Jesus asks?

Are you enjoying joy in the surprises that come your way?

Are you watching from the edge what great things Christ is doing?

Are you hoping and praying that Christ's new mission in our community means greater connectivity between the wider community and St Ninian's?

Who are you in this story today? If you're not who you thought you were, it's never too late to reassess, in fact, Jesus would ask you to pray about what or where He is asking of you, and then equip you with what is required to do His service.

Amen.