

## **Fishing Strategy**

When I was growing up on Loch Fyne, the herring industry was still booming.

In the early nineteenth century the British government gave bounties on herring sold abroad. Once the railway network was extended, the herring catch could be sold around Britain easily. The Scottish fishing industry became the biggest in the world. 10,000 boats were in the industry in 1913. Herring was considered a delicacy abroad and it was exported.

When the fish were landed at the Quay. The fish were emptied into long wooden troughs. Teams of women would gut and sort the herring into baskets or small barrels. The fish were sorted for size and condition. Even the guts sold for fertiliser. All was going well!

It gave employment to women.

Gutting crews gave women untold new freedom to travel and work. In 1913, 2,400 women left Stornoway in May and June to follow the fishing fleet.

But the industry was to come to an abrupt end. The herring were over-fished.

But I have memories, I suppose in the 1970's when there was still a large fleet of 40-50 foot fishing boats entering the harbour of Tarbert Loch Fyne.

They had fished all night and at the beginning of the day they were returning after a hard night's work.

The seagulls were circling above the boats calling out for scraps.

The hulls of the boats were overflowing with the little silver darlings and the banter and camaraderie of the fishermen was second to none.

It was a boyhood dream to be asked aboard one of those large boats during the summer holidays, as they sped out of the harbour in the dusk light.

There was the excitement of watching men at work and the boats fished in pairs – called neighbours – as they shot out their nets together and dragged it along the ocean scooping up the innocent fish into its nets.

Jesus would have been familiar with the sight of fishing boats from his home on the shores of the Galilean Sea. The fishing industry was booming

for them also. He seemed at ease speaking to fishermen. In fact it is fishermen, whom he first calls to follow him. Jesus is at work in the common and ordinary every day activities of life. He is there, amongst the hard-working fishermen. God in human flesh in amongst the rough and tumble of fishing.

So, it's not surprising at the start of his ministry, and then after his resurrection, that it is fishermen who take centre stage – not academics, not yet anyway, not religious people, he chose humble, hardworking, robust strong fishermen who would make many mistakes to be the backbone of his team of disciples. This is the first church!

Luke's Gospel at chapter 5 has Jesus speaking to crowds of people from Simon's boat. He then instructs Simon, who was yet to be called Peter, to go out into deep water and let down his net for a catch. Simon questions this, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything!"

Have you ever felt like this in the Church?

Master, we've done all we can and you ask us to do more!

I wonder what would have been the reaction to the fishermen in Tarbert, when they arrived back in the morning light with their empty holds, as may well have been the case on many nights, and been told by a religious teacher, to go back out and let their nets down in the deep water.

Deep water fishing is what these Galileans are called to do; it involved a lot of rowing to get back out into the deep.

But there was something about Jesus and Peter knew this. He calls him Master. By this time Jesus would have already been causing a stir in the local villages; "Because you say so I will let down the nets".

Here is the beginning of Peter's faith – Hearing the words of Jesus and obeying them.

Fast forward 3 years in the life of Peter, and the disciples and a lot of water has flowed under the bridge. The one Simon called Master, he was now calling him Lord and in fact God.

But the one he called Son of God, had just died the cruellest of deaths on a Roman cross and he had denied knowing him three times.

But then resurrection came, and so as we come to the conclusion of John's Gospel, we come to a similar story, that is about sending Peter – no longer Simon - and the disciples out once again out into the deep to fish.

Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some...

Both fishing stories have to do with the Mission of the Church. The first, in Luke's Gospel, was of Jesus commissioning Simon to become a disciple; Follow me and you will become a fisher of men, and so he had to do three years of learning his trade. Simon was to become Peter. He was on a journey of change.

The second fishing story, our Gospel reading today, is about Jesus' recommissioning of Peter, reinstating Peter, to lead his Church and to feed his sheep – to be the shepherd of the Church – from fishermen to shepherds!

Those two stories are like bookends of mission. They tell us so much about God's mission for His Church.

What has this to say to us this morning?

Has it any relevance?

Is it just a nice story about Jesus teaching the disciples how to catch a fish?

Well, it's much deeper than that!

It's no secret that the Church is facing a great challenge – it's not just happened, it's been coming for decades now. The Church as we know it, like the herring industry, is slowly dying and like the disciples, we may well feel exhausted.

The herring in Lochfyne has all but disappeared and so has the forty - fifty foot fishing boats. What do the fishermen do now? Do they still continue to fish for herring, hoping that one day they may return? Hoping that one day their nets will be bulging again or do they take Jesus' advice and cast the nets over the right side. In other words, try a different strategy.

That's exactly what they've done. The forty – fifty-foot boats have all but gone, the large buildings and cathedrals remain as relics of the past, and now the harbour has small, more efficient boats, versatile, smaller crews, smaller overheads, and they have focused on a different market. No longer do they go after the silver darlings, which are no longer there, but now they fish for red lobsters and prawns and the customer base has moved to serve the holidaying population on the south of Spain. In fact just before lockdown, lobsters and prawns were being flown alive to China. That was the new market that had opened up.

There are times when we have to recognise that the fish are no longer there, that the market has changed and we might spend all our strength and efforts on something which has finished.

No wonder the disciples were tired but because Jesus has instructed them, they are willing to have last go.

I hope that you can see where I am going with this.

This story is written for us and all weary travellers on the road of following Jesus.

Cast your net on the other side of the boat.

Is the Spirit saying to the church, now is the time to cast on the other side of the boat?

Over the last two years we have been involved in Growing Young, a timely encounter shared with a group of Christians, all facing the same challenges as churches the length and breadth of the country are facing and over those two years we have engaged with Fullerton Youth Institute, a reformed protestant University in California,

The Fuller Youth Institute turns academic research into practical resources to help make the Church the best place for young people to grow.

They have researched healthy churches, and they have come up with 6 principles or commitments that healthy churches were doing and these churches were able to attract and hold and develop young people and families. They are teaching churches how and where to cast their nets.

So, over the two years, we have developed a church transformational plan, yes, we are casting our nets over the right side of the boat. We are changing and refreshing the way that we are doing things.

We have too!

Can you imagine if the herring fishermen continued to fish in Loch Fyne, what would have happened, there would be no food on the table, they would not have been able to exist.

The plan is based on the six key commitments, Unlocking Key Chain leadership – Yes, giving people the opportunity to be empowered to lead; in other words, training up fishermen for today's world.

Empathising with today's young people – instead of judging and criticising, step into their shoes – understand the new market, so that we know where to cast our nets;

Taking Jesus' message seriously by welcoming young people into a Jesus-centred community – it's important that we have the right tools for the job and that what we offer people touches their lives;

Fuelling a warm community – through intergenerational friendships, making sure that our fishermen are happy and content and motivated.

Prioritising young people and families everywhere – instead of giving lip service to how much young people matter – this is developing our market, caring for those we are reaching out to, looking for creative ways to tangibly support, resource and involve them in facets of the congregational life and finally being the best neighbours – building bridges and working collaboratively with the world outside the Church.

From studying these commitments and also embracing the five marks of mission, we have come up with a vivid description of what the Church could look like in five years' time. FYI see this vision as vital for without vision the people perish.

This is the draft, a vision of where we can fish, of where the fish are and how we are going to get there.

### **CADDER CHURCH – PART OF GOD'S JIGSAW**

**In 5 years' time, Cadder's ministry will come together like a jigsaw puzzle, revealing the picture of a vibrant, dynamic church at the centre of our community**

**The spiritual life of the church will be strong and deep, offering multi-generational worship and fellowship opportunities. Worship will take many different forms. Everyone, regardless of age or experience, gets to take part and is encouraged to bring their own particular piece of the jigsaw.**

**We will communicate around and about the church in a wide variety of ways. The church will be open to individuals and groups of people both online and in person. It will be known as a place where support is offered with kindness and sensitivity. It will be seen as an anchor point in the community which it serves.**

**The feeling will be that of a family where everyone looks out for everyone else. Our focus on care and community will make Cadder a place where people feel they belong. The church will radiate love and acceptance and when people come alongside us they will be seen to add new and vibrant parts to an ever growing jigsaw.**

**Cadder will be a church which cares about creation. We will actively work to reduce our impact on the planet and will engage with other likeminded people and organisations to be a catalyst for change in the community. It will be a church which is known for being willing to pioneer things which enables change in society. By its actions it will help shape that piece of the jigsaw which is the church's part in social justice and reform.**

**In 5 years' time, Cadder will be a church which is Growing. It will be seen as a Jesus-centred community where everyone values each other and treasures God's Word and World.**

But do we do this work alone?

The answer to this question is simply no, for the Church at large is changing. We are being encouraged or instructed to work collaboratively with other churches and to work with a smaller resource of ministers.

We are to be best neighbours and that will mean working closely with our neighbouring churches. The herring boats fished in pairs – sometimes in threes. They were best neighbours for they knew that it was in everyone's interest that they worked closely together. They shared the same vision, simply catching herring to put food on the tables for their families. They looked after each other's needs and they knew if one was struggling, so would the other.

That's the model that we are being encouraged to form, not just a partnership but something even deeper. It's called a Cluster Group. A collaborative, supportive form of doing ministry.

So, over the next two months, there will be much discussion, prayer, listening to each other as the 3 Church of Scotland's in Bishopbriggs talk and pray together about how they will go forward into this ever changing generation, with God's mission.

Yes, we will be working on a shared vision. As this unfolds, I will keep everyone informed how this proceeds. At the moment as with all the congregations in Glasgow Presbytery, we are forming a cluster group of

Cadder, Kenmure and Springfield Cambridge, and we've been asked to form a 5 year plan of the way forward for the three congregations, sharing our goals and how we will reach this with a reduction in ministries.

So, we are instructed to cast into the deep, as Jesus said, go out into the deep water and let your nets down, as he said later, cast your net on the right side of the boat. This is about fishing in the deep and trying something new.

If we don't, then like the herring industry, the church will simply disappear, but if we are obedient to the voice of Jesus, and are prepared to be brave, and have vision and trust in God, then just possibly our mission will continue, and once again our boats will be full of produce from the sea.

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

Amen.

**One of my favourite hymns is *Lord you have come to the sea shore* and we will sing it after the sermon.**