

Luke 5 v1-11 - Keys

When I was 19, my parents handed me a set of keys. These keys belonged to a shop in Lochgilphead. They said to me, *get on with it John and manage this for us*. I was brought up in retail, I watched them build a successful business from scratch, I saw their hard work, their tears and sweat. From a boy, I watched closely and now they were sending me out into the deep, *get on with it – you can do it*, and not once did they interfere but left the running, buying, selling and everything else that goes with a business up to me. Fail or succeed the responsibility was mine!

With hindsight, I can see that the Lord used this as training for the ministry. Meeting people, conversing, understanding situations and I wouldn't have changed it. The best training that I could ever get!

The business was blessed, expanded, developed and 13 years later I was receiving a different call to go out into the deep and this was ministry, another new adventure, a time of learning, studying, preparation and five years later after selection school, I was doing my probationary at Springfield Cambridge and then I was handed another set of keys by the Presbytery Clerk at the time, Alex Cunningham, the keys to a church in a housing scheme in the heart of Glasgow. *There you are John, you've done your training, now get on with it!*

I'm sure you could share with me similar stories from your life of when you have been entrusted with keys; keys that open doors to new possibilities and new ventures. How did you feel? Empowered! Responsible! Trusted!

That is what our Gospel reading is about today. Matthew 16:18-19

¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell, will not overcome it. ¹⁹ I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

Growing Young is a programme that a small group in the church has been reflecting on over the last two years. A programme that comes from across the ocean but is very much grounded in our Scottish culture. A programme that has at its heart Keychain Leadership, which is literally about handing over the Keys of responsibility to others.

Professor Kara Powell of Fuller Institute in California speaks passionately of keychain leadership.

She talks about the first volunteer role given to her as a teenager in her home church. "I'm here today," she explains, "because someone handed the keys over to me."

Imagine that, she is now a Prof of a great Theological Institution in America and the reason she states is because someone gave her a chance.

It's not a case of simply saying, *here's the keys of the church get on with it!*

That would come much later for Peter. That would come when Peter was able to profess that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of the living God.

But Peter had to learn about the role. It's a case of *Come and See – Peter come and see what I'm doing. Come and be my apprentice and learn from me. When you are ready, you will be entrusted with the keys of the Kingdom.* That was the message!

The fishermen were mending their nets at the side of the lake. Going about their ordinary business in the heat of the mid-day Palestinian sunshine.

An ordinary day was just about to become extraordinary.

For into their lives was to step one greater than them. Into their lives that day was to step God through Jesus Christ.

No doubt they heard Jesus teach the people as they worked at their nets. No doubt fascinated that he stepped on to Simon's boat to share God's word.

But then things changed dramatically.

When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "*Put your boat into the deep water and put down your nets for a catch.*"

Simon was about to learn his first lesson!

That faith comes through going into the deep water. Faith is not something which develops at the safety of the lake side, if we are serious about growing in faith, it involves casting off and going into the deep.

It is risky! Putting faith in someone is risky! Before someone gets keys they need to know what's involved.

My parents could have given me a far easier task but they wanted to challenge me. When I passed my driving test at the second time, the first time I failed because I wasn't prepared. The second time I got the strictest, meanest driving instructor that you could imagine. I didn't like his style but he got to me a standard that would get me to pass.

Jesus sends his disciples into the deep water to learn their skills. They had a three-year crash course on being a follower of Jesus before they were permitted to have the keys!

“Put your boat into deep water” and in these words, Jesus was saying something profound to Simon. *Following me Simon will be about deep-water fishing.*

That’s where the fish are. That’s where we need to go if the church is to grow. We need to go out and into the deep, into the areas that we’ve never been before, into challenges and the unknown.

Jesus is teaching them to listen to him, trust him and go where he is calling.

Oh, how we want to stay near to the shore, in the security of all that we have known, the security of the past, the security of tradition, but he is saying to Simon, *that’s not my way. A new way has opened up and you need to go there.*

A mother eagle breaks the nest up when she wants her eaglets to fly. She literally makes it so uncomfortable for them that she forces them out of the nest so to fly, eagles were designed for flight and Jesus is doing the same with the disciples. They were designed to fish for people. Put your boats into the deep.

So, Simon that day rather reluctantly does what Jesus says. He responds, *Master...we've worked all night...we're tired...we've caught nothing...we have to go home to our wives and families with nothing to put on their plates. But, because you say so, I will let down my nets...*

Peter was learning the lesson of trust. Perhaps some of us may feel like the disciples...*we've worked hard for years...we're tired...our nets need mending and we don't seem to have much to show...but because you say so Lord...we will do it!*

Faith begins here. Receiving the keys for the Kingdom begins here. Listening to Jesus, walking in his way, trusting him for each step. *You say so Lord, I will do it.*

Keychain leadership in the church asks the question; how will the church go forward? Who will lead the church forward? Who is going to take the church to the next generation?

Presbytery planning is all very well. It's about how do we do church with fewer ministers.

Discipleship is about preparing for succession. If the church is to continue, it needs to do more than a presbytery plan, it needs to prepare for the next generation or it finishes with the present one. I'm sure that nobody wants that. I'm sure that everybody here wants this church to be sailing into the deep in the next generation. When we are not here, we would want this church to be going forward.

If Jesus hadn't spent time in training up the twelve, then there would be no church, for they were the ones whom he entrusted, and when he died and went to heaven, he poured his Spirit into their lives and the disciples literally came alive spiritually, they became Apostles and took the church out into the community sharing the good news. If this hadn't happened – there would have been no church.

At the Kirk Session tomorrow evening, we will be discussing plans about how to take the church forward – we will be looking at how to give people keys of responsibility and how we can take the church forward.

Jesus knew from the outset, if his vision of the Kingdom of God was to go forward: He would need to train up individuals to take it forward. He would need to cast a vision that they would catch. He would need to send them into deep waters.

This is where discipleship, apprenticeship, keychain leadership, call it what you like begins. Inviting people to come and see, catch the vision, to come and watch for one day you will have the keys.

For we read, so they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

I suppose that you will all remember passing your driving test. One of the scariest moments of your life – It was for me. When I passed, at 18, I can remember giving the examiner a hug. I'm not quite sure that was the right protocol because he looked rather bemused.

As I got the out of the car, my father was waiting for me. He had driven me up to Lochgilphead 14 miles from Tarbert, to the driving centre and when I told him I'd passed, he handed me the keys to his car and he said, *OK drive me home – you've passed.*

Another set of keys!

Today we are celebrating the sacrament of Communion. This is the highpoint of our Christian faith. This is when we reflect on the commitment of Jesus for us. He went into the deep waters for us. He went into the deep water of Calvary. He immersed himself in the depths of our sins and he allowed this to happen, so that we might know the fullness of God's love. He did this for us. He cast his nets into the depths of death, so that we might be brought into his glory.

Come and see and in the taking of the sacraments, reflect on the wine, his blood shed on a cross for the sins of the world. Reflect on his body, bread, pierced for our transgressions. This is the heart of our faith and he says, *come and see.*

Come to the cross and see my suffering. Stand there with my mother and a few others and here me say "Father forgive them for they know not what they do."

Come to the empty tomb, and see that the stone is rolled away and that I am no longer lying there. I have risen and I am alive for ever. Come and celebrate today and pull up your boats on the shore and leave everything and follow me.