

"Not me, Lord!"

Printed in Woman Alive magazine, 2005

Thoughts on Matthew 4 v19:

"Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men."



I like to think that this particular call isn't actually for me. I'm quite happy for other glowing, healthy types to traipse all over the globe as missionaries. I'm less okay, but still not that bothered, by those 'whacky' types who feel the need to stand in the high street waving at flip-chart illustrations ("See the way the cross bridges the gap between man and God?") But when it comes to sharing my faith, telling people about what Jesus did for me, the actual getting-your-hands-dirty work of 'fishing', I'm pretty uneasy. I make excuses hoping that the 'witness' of the way I live is enough.

Which is fine, until a colleague who's known me for over a year let drop the other day that she had no idea I was a Christian. Perhaps my subtle witness is that bit too subtle. Maybe I'm so frightened of coming across as a 'freaky religious type' that I don't actually look any different from anyone else. Perhaps I'm expecting too much of that 'magical inner glow of

Jesus' that I hoped was radiating out of me and quietly touching lives.

So maybe I do need that rod and line after all. Or perhaps just a beginners net. But the problem remains: how do I win people for Jesus without doing loads of culturally-odd things, that given my reserved temperament, would feel very uncomfortable? I know; it's meant to be good to get out of your comfort zone, but is it so good for other people? Is the best way to tell folks about Jesus' love by approaching strangers in the street? Do I feel happy when someone tries to 'sell' me Jesus in that way?

So how about chatting about Jesus to the people I meet during the day? I'll merrily proclaim, "I'm not ashamed of the gospel" at a Delirious concert, and happily bellow, "I Believe in Jesus" at church, but between you and me, the thought of even mentioning His name on the bus or in a café, fills me with horror.

I've realised over the years, that outside of Greenbelt, being a Christian is never going to be cool. I guess Jesus never pretended that fitting in was going to be part of the deal. At school I was teased in Maths lessons ("Sing us a hymn Susannah," and "Where are your sandals?") and later at art college I became the dorm joke when surrounded by drug-taking housemates ("God phoned for you – wants you to have the next virgin birth.") In fact, I got so fed up with valiantly 'going against the flow' that I took what I call my Year Out, during which I lived by my own rules and let Christianity drop to the floor. Or tried to; it would have been fun if it wasn't for God continually reminding me that he still loved me but that I was on the wrong path.

So I'm now several years into deciding which pieces of my faith are worth picking up. I'm just not entirely convinced that dancing in the town centre to Christian music (yes, I've done it) is going to make it in the selection process. After years of feeling a misfit, the idea of quietly fitting in looks most appealing.

But there's still the little problem of what Jesus said: "I will make you fishers of men." There doesn't seem to be a whole lot of choice there. I might decide that I'm not going to feel obliged to lift my hands in worship, or only ever wear ankle-skimming skirts. But I'm not sure that leaving this piece on the ground is an option.

But let's look again at what Jesus actually says; I wonder if there's hope in the wording: "I will make you..." Could it be that God will use me, in spite of me? Will he side-step things like shyness and a desire to blend in? There's a cheering possibility that I might not need to change into someone else in order for God to use me. Maybe I won't be flung into the streets clutching 'Journey Into Life' leaflets just yet. Maybe He'll use me amongst the people I know, touching lives in my corner of the world with small things, thoughts and kind words.

Of course it could be that I've come full-circle and the 'quietly touching lives' thing is just a big cop-out. In which case, I need to get over my self-consciousness, clear my throat, grab a flip-chart and prepare my heart to say, "Okay Lord – send me."

I really do hope not.