

BACK TO SCHOOL WITH GOD 2015

First Steps - Luke 5:1-11

Anyone been on beach this summer? Where did you go? What did you do there?

Jesus was on the beach. He was in the middle of the crowd teaching them about God; He needed more space so He borrowed a boat belonging to one of the fishermen sitting on the beach; but the fisherman was working, he was mending his nets. When He had finished teaching, Jesus told them to go out to catch fish; they had caught nothing all night, but..., OK! In this new catch there were so many fish; the nets were bulging, about to break! Peter and his friends were astonished; Wow! Then, Jesus said *"Don't be afraid; from now on you will catch men!" Follow me!* They did. They saw that Jesus was someone special; they could trust Jesus; so they took their first steps in following Jesus.

Did you make footprints in the sand? If you go back tomorrow they won't be there anymore because the sea has washed them away or the wind has blown the sand! We used to play a game on the beach in our family, and it was all about walking in my footsteps. I can't remember how it started except that one of the children started walking in my footprints in the sand, so I then made long strides and they had to copy, or make very small steps or walk round in a circle and they had to do everything I did. Most of it was fine, except my legs were longer than theirs when they were small and sometimes it was playing this game, but it was good fun.

This is not about making footsteps in the sand on the beach, like our game; these men started to go everywhere with Jesus; they listened to Him teach; they watched Him heal people and they began to like the way Jesus was thinking, the way He was talking, the kind of person He was, so they began to learn to be like Him, to walk in His footsteps. They didn't always get it right and we'll see more about that in a minute, but these were Peter's first steps in following Jesus.

Following Jesus is what we're called to do. We are called to learn to trust Him for every part of our lives; to learn to be like Him in the way we think, the way we speak, the way we get on with our friends, the way we behave all day every day, at school and all kinds of other places. Our first steps are sometimes shaky and sometimes we fall over, but just as Jesus called Peter to follow Him, so He calls us to follow Him. It's an adventure! "They pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed Him,"

Some are making their first steps at school, starting P1 tomorrow, starting High School, starting a new teaching job, taking a new responsibility. That can be scary! We're not sure how it will be!

Out of Step - Luke 22:54-62

Things had been going well for Peter and the others; Jesus was becoming famous; they had a new purpose in life, a new set of friends; life was different in so many ways and they enjoyed the purpose Jesus had given and the challenge of being His followers. They had seen Jesus heal people; Peter had walked on water, having got out of the boat. It was great! But now everything was starting to go wrong. They were in Jerusalem and things were beginning to turn ugly; Jesus was being threatened and they no longer felt safe. Jesus was even talking about His death. Now there came a day when Peter was out of step with Jesus.

Jesus was arrested. That's when it really began to go wrong. The guards who arrested Him took Him to Caiaphas' house; Peter decided to follow, at a distance. They took Jesus inside and there was a fire in courtyard outside and Peter sat down to keep warm beside the fire. Then one of servants, a girl, said "This man was with Him" pointing to Jesus inside. This was scary! Might Peter be arrested too? So he said "I don't know Him!" He just said that he didn't know Jesus! Two more times, other people said to Peter: "you're one of them; You're from Galilee" and two more times Peter said "I am not; I don't know what you're talking about!" Out of step with Jesus; then the cock crowed and Peter remembered that Jesus had said this would happen!

The courtyard was a hard place for Peter to say that Jesus was his friend; it was a threatening place. There are all kinds of places which are hard places for us to own up to being Christians, saying that Jesus is our friend. School can be one of these places; we can find it hard to stand up for Him when our friends make fun of Jesus; we find it hard to keep following Jesus when other people behave in different ways, speak differently; and we don't want to be seen to be different. But then we feel that we've let Jesus down and that we're out of step with Jesus. This is not just children; there are some Christians who are teachers, but nobody knows and they don't want anybody to know! Does that mean that we are out of step? Jesus knows what we face; He knows what makes us afraid.

This is not the end of the story for Peter; there is still more to come.

Pray for people in schools: for pupils, teachers, parents involved; pray for Christian influence in all these areas. Support these people by our prayers, hence this service. Pray for chaplains who listen to people in need and support them; pray for SU groups to have some Christian influence in life of a school.

Back in Step - John 21:15-17

We're back on the beach; Peter has been back fishing; Jesus is on the beach cooking breakfast for His friends. Well, Peter is not sure that he is still Jesus' friend. He has let Jesus down, he has been out of step; what happens now? Will Jesus still love him, accept him? We're on the same beach that Peter took his first steps with Jesus, following Him; in the city he fell out of step, but now he's back on the beach is there any hope?

Let's have breakfast. Jesus is cooking some fish; there's bread too! He's making a meal for His friends and they are all welcome; "Peter, have some food!" Then, there's a conversation as Jesus and Peter walk along the beach together. "Peter, do you love me? Do you want to follow me? Do you want to be my friend?" Wow! That's a big question, an even bigger question for someone who fell out of step with Jesus big time in the city! What's Peter's answer: "Not sure! Maybe! It depends!"? His real answer was "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you!" So Jesus gives Peter a new job, to be the leader, to be responsible for the whole church. Two more times, Jesus asks same question; two more times Peter says "Yes"; two more times Jesus tells Peter he has a new leadership job. Peter is back in step; he's back being Jesus' friend.

Jesus knows when we get things wrong; He knows when we make mistakes; He knows when we're scared to own up to being His friend; Jesus forgives us our mistakes and helps us get back into step and be even stronger than we were before. So we can be ready to follow Him even better than we did before, wherever we are.

Here's the most important question: "do you love me?" Do we want to be a friend of Jesus?

See the footsteps on the communion table: each one is about you and me following Jesus. The picture that goes with this service today has been a whole lot of feet, different shapes and sizes, different shoes, but we walk with our feet. Whether in trainers, school shoes, gym shoes, walking boots, or high heels - we walk! We use that as a picture of our faith, our relationship with Jesus: we walk in His ways, we learn to be the kind of people He wants us to be. We walk with Him alongside us; we live in the ways He wants; we know that He is with us everywhere we go.

Prayers (from SU's Back to School with God material)

Jesus said: Do you love me?

Lord Jesus, we do love you. We are sorry when we let you down and say that we don't know you. Thank you that you died on the cross to take our blame, lift our guilt and wash us clean. Please forgive us and give us a brand new start, like you did for Peter. Help us as we take our first steps in following you, especially as we go back to school.

Jesus said: Do you love me?

Lord Jesus, there are times when we forget to love you. There are places we go where it is hard to say we know you. Help us to follow you in the classroom, in the playground, at home and when we are with our friends. Make us bold in telling others about you, and take away our fear of what others might think and say. You had a perfect plan for Peter's life, and we know you do for ours too. Help us to set aside the things that distract us from following you, and keep our hearts pure.

Jesus said: Do you love me?

Lord Jesus, there are times when loving you gets squeezed out of our busy lives. Come and inhabit our diaries, our workplaces, and our family life. Guard and protect our children as they go back to school. Help us as parents, and as a church family, to support and guide them, and grant us your wisdom in every situation. Strengthen teachers and help them to love the children in their care.

All: Amen.