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## **Putting Out in Deep Water (Luke 5.1-11)**

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Almost exactly 10 years ago, on Saturday 4 February 2012, Benedictus met for the first time. Some of you were there!

In the beginning, it was Neil's idea. One wakeful night, at a painful turning point in our lives, he was inspired by the possibility of initiating a contemplative worshipping community. Grounded in the practice of silence and deep listening, in open-hearted, open-minded relationship to the Real, we dreamed of a church that would be ecumenical and transforming. We wondered what form such a community could take – and conversations with Susanna and Nikolai encouraged and enabled our next steps. We pondered and meditated, and as we did there came a name – Benedictus; a symbol – our tree of life; a font – Herculanium; and five marks to orient our way of being together – hospitality, silence, discernment, reconciliation and adventure. And on February 4 2012, we gathered – few in number – to share word, music and silence, and afterwards a champagne supper. We gave ourselves 5 months – till Pentecost. Let's commit for that long, we said, and see what happens – let's see if there's life in this. Ten years later – here we all are.

As I look back on these past ten years, and as I think about Benedictus now, I'm struck by a sense of the mystery in what's happened and the mystery of what's yet to be. As we celebrate this milestone, it's a sense of participating in mystery that I'd like to explore with you, and invite you to share.

Why are we here? What do we think we're doing? I imagine, for most of us, we join a faith community, embark on a spiritual practice, because we've been looking for something – something real, true, meaningful, connecting. We've been drawn or attracted by a whiff of it, like the crowds who were drawn to Jesus in our passage from Luke's gospel, 'pressing in on him to hear the word of God'. Of course, we may not have described our seeking in quite these terms. Nevertheless, we've

come. And like Simon saying 'yes' to Jesus' request to sit in his boat, we too have been willing to offer our hospitality, to be open to encounter. Being part of this community, participating in its prayer, we've made space for some new understanding, or presence, or direction to touch our lives, to impact our life's rhythm. We might not know or have known what this would mean for us, just as Simon – routinely mending his nets – couldn't have imagined what was about to happen for him. After all, up till now, he's just been on the periphery of things, a helpful bystander in the orbit of the teacher. But for us, as for him, there comes a point, suddenly it can seem, when Jesus addresses us directly. 'Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch'.

As you know, this is about much more than fishing. In the Scriptural imagination, 'deep water' is a metaphor for unknowability and untameability, even overwhelm and chaos. It symbolises the unfathomable mystery of God, who disrupts our settled lives and calls us on. And according to the wisdom of our tradition, contemplation is how we let down our nets. Through silence, stillness and awareness we become receptive. For the 'catch' is not something we can conjure or manufacture from our own resources. We can work all night long, as Simon had done, but it will be to no avail. It's only as we're responsive, only as we listen for and obey the direction of the Master, that something may be given beyond all expectation – abundant resource, overflowing grace.

Ten years ago, we put out into deep water (though not for the first time), and we let down our nets. The 'catch' has been amazing, suffused by a sense of gift. And as I reflect on where and how we find ourselves now, and how we might continue participating in this mystery, I wanted to share two themes that recur for me.

One concerns the interdependence of our personal and corporate journeys, as we push out from the shore. On the one hand, each one of us must respond for ourselves – Jesus addresses his disciples individually, by name, and calls each one to realise their being in relation to God. At the same time, we're not just a conglomeration of individuals, seeking God by and for ourselves. We need each

other to help us listen, and to recognise and receive what is being given. When Simon Peter let down the nets, they caught so many fish, Luke writes, 'that their nets were beginning to break. So they signalled their partners in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both boats' (Luke 5.7).

The truth is that the character of our personal responsivity affects not only ourselves, but the vitality and generativity of the whole body; and vice versa. We've all encountered communities of faith, I suspect, where it feels as though they're just going through the motions, repeating words and rites that have gone dead, and are now powerless (as Bonhoeffer puts it) to transform. John Main says: 'A tradition does not and cannot survive either merely by being talked about or by being written down. A tradition survives and grows only because men and women can be found who will enter into the experience of the tradition. In other words, we not only inherit a tradition but we have to re-create the tradition in every generation and we re-create by discovering it from our own experience and at that moment of discovery, the tradition lives. It is a living tradition, and living, it possesses power. It becomes a living flame that has the power to enlighten, to guide and to warm'.

And this is how I understand the vocation of Benedictus. It's this living truth and power of God that we seek to know as persons and as a community, so that in and through our life together, we and others will find access to warmth and truth and rest.

This brings me to my second recurring theme. A further aspect of the mystery in which, I believe, we're participating concerns the relationship between our Benedictus community and the many other communities we're part of or connected to. After Simon obeys Jesus' direction to 'put out into deep water', he is told, 'from now on you will be catching people'. Or (in the older translation) 'you will become fishers of men'. The danger with this language is it sounds a lot like recruitment – as if the church's mission is to catch people and sign them up. This gives rise to a sense of 'insiders' and 'outsiders' – such that 'we' go out to 'them', we compete for

people's time and attention and allegiance, so that 'they' become part of 'us' and 'we' can look successful.

This is a subtle point. There is a sense in which we *are* called to share what we trust is good news, and to 'love and serve the world'. But there's often a tacit dualism assumed in all this – a dualism that distorts how we understand our vocation and mission as church.

I've been saying that a community such as ours is entirely constituted by its listening, its responsiveness to call. It has no other foundation. If this is right, it means that the sociality that is the church cannot be fixed into an institution concerned for its own survival or expansion, competing with others for power or influence or impact. Instead, the real being and meaning of the church is given at another level – and this meaning may not be obviously visible or identifiable. Like the kingdom of God, you cannot say of it 'here it is' or 'there it is'. You know it only by its effect.

Jesus says, 'when two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them'. And to be gathered 'in Jesus' name' is to be present in the world as mercy, liberation and acceptance; it's to be in the midst of things in such a way as to remind the world of its own deep truth and ground, and of the love that sustains all things. Wherever we're being that way – in our families, workplaces, communities – we're opening access to the depths into which we ourselves have entered. And it's only as we continue in this way, that we have anything to share with others.

So – now we are 10!

For me and Neil – the life and growth of Benedictus has been a source of enormous joy and fulfilment. I celebrate what this community is and is becoming, what is being enabled in and through it; I'm amazed to have been part of it and humbled by all of you, who have joined us on the way – and excited that today we commission Susanna and Melissa to their new roles among us. All along, I've been aware of a subtle energy infusing and suffusing our life. May we continue responsive to this energy, faithful and free.