

We all know about the success of the golfer, Tiger Woods. He had one of the most incredible first years of any professional golfer in 1997. He won the prestigious Masters Tournament by an unheard 12 strokes. He went on to earn £1 million pounds and £40 million in endorsements from Nike and other companies. That was in his first year as a professional.

But he didn't stop there. Right after the Masters victory, he phoned his coach and told him that he wanted to change his swing. He said his swing wasn't good enough. He wanted to make further improvements. He was willing to risk his career in order to further improve his skills.

While he was changing his swing, he won only 1 tournament in the next 19 months. And then one day it all clicked into place. In the year 2000 he won the US Open with a 10 shot lead, he also won the British Open, and the PGA Championships, and then followed in the next two years by winning the Masters consecutively.

And yet many people did not know that he completely revamped his swing after his first year. I wonder why he made the change? Why did he feel he needed to change a good thing? The reason was that he was not content with staying the way he was – he knew there was more to learn – and so he strived to go deeper with his game and master any glitches.

Likewise, this morning, I want to briefly look at how Jesus is not afraid to change things around, even good things, because there is something else that he wants to accomplish. And in what we read, we see that things seem ok. Jesus has a crowd of people listening to him. He has a captive audience – and so what more could he ask for? He doesn't need to change anything. But then something else attracts his attention and focus.

You can imagine the crowds are clambering over each other to be able to hear the wise teacher. And so Jesus asks Simon to move him out in his boat – just a little, so that Jesus could still address the crowd, but probably by creating that distance, more people are able to see him. You see – he wanted to change things around for a better outcome.

But actually I believe there was a different reason why Jesus wanted to speak from the boat. It was so that he could have an audience of one – with Simon.

1. Which brings me to my first point, that Jesus is interested in us all, but even more he's interested in the individual.

Jesus loves us coming together in fellowship – and he delights in that – but he actually is only interested in his relationship with each of us. And we can sometimes feel very uneasy when we put ourselves in a place which may feel somewhat vulnerable, where we are both honest with ourselves, and also honest with God. But that's what Jesus needs each of us do, in the way he did with Simon, he wants us to be willing to set aside time just with him – no one else.

Isn't it amazing? Jesus was willing to leave the crowds in order to focus on just one person. Do we feel uncomfortable with the idea that in every aspect of our church life we should pro-actively choose to meet and have an encounter with Jesus through it? Have you ever considered that Jesus is only interested in how much you are interested in him?

But why would Jesus want to have any encounter with one person? After all, his addresses to the crowd were very effective.

2. And this brings me to my second point, it's because he wants to take each of us to another level, to take us to a deeper faith.

You see, Simon was busy repairing his nets. He had one eye on his business interest and one eye on what Jesus was doing with the crowd. After all, he had other responsibilities – his livelihood was important, like it would be for many of us in order to support our families. So Simon thought he couldn't give up what he was doing and spend any more time with Jesus.

After Jesus had finished teaching, he asked Simon to move out into deeper water. This move from shallow water to deeper water may actually be an analogy of what Jesus was going to do in Simon's faith life.

Jesus was going to take Simon from his half-hearted, casual attention of faith, and turn it into a much deeper, more personal and real encounter with Jesus. But sometimes to get there, Jesus needs to push us a little, to push us out of our comfortable mindset. Simon had told Jesus that they had tried to catch fish and had not caught a thing. Similarly, we may say, "But I've done it before. I'm already involved enough in church. I've now decided that I'm going to spend my spare time in other interests. I'm already happy, thank you very much, with the level and depth I'm at'.

But Jesus wants us to be willing to journey with him into deeper water, into more unfamiliar surroundings. He wants you to move into a deeper place where your dependency moves away from the shoreline, from your own securities, into a deeper dependency on him. For each of us, an encounter with Jesus will change us forever.

Simon wasn't sure how far he was going with Jesus. And if we are willing to give more to him, then we may feel out of our depth. If I'm honest I feel out of my depth all the time, but the comforting thing is that even though we don't know exactly where the boat is going, we know that Jesus is with us.

3. And this therefore brings me to my final point, which is that whatever we think we are concerned with, Jesus wants us to begin focussing on what he is concerned with.

Simon could only see the problems – the depth of water and the lack of fish – and yet Jesus wanted him to see the possibilities when Simon would put his trust in him.

You see, whenever Jesus has an encounter with us, he wants us to be more concerned about the spiritual things rather than the physical things. It's only when we concentrate more on the spiritual that we realise the greater importance of our relationship and dependency on him.

He wants us to have a larger faith, a broader vision, and a deeper commitment. For this year ahead and for whatever time it will take, this must be our focus – going deeper. We can have all the programmes in the world but we must strive for each person to go deeper. So where can that most evidently be played out? Well through bible study, prayer gatherings, and corporate worship. We can spend all the money on lots of other things, but the interesting thing about these 3 deepening activities is that they cost nothing. But the price for going deeper results in us having to sacrifice much more.

Folks, It's scary to step out into a deeper place, but Jesus won't get our attention if we are clinging on to the shoreline. I challenge each of you this morning to consider your desire to re-encounter Jesus, letting him into your boat. He's interested in you alone, he wants each of you to go to a deeper level with him, and he wants you to move away from your own concerns and seek what concerns him.

Let's pray.

Father, I call upon your Spirit now to work in each heart here this morning. I pray that each of us will be completely honest with you this morning. May each of us encounter you afresh over this year, compelling us to go deeper with you. Father forgive us when we cling on to the comfortable surroundings of our shorelines, and as we journey with you, I pray that we make your concerns for this community our concerns. In Jesus name I pray. Amen.