

Let's go fishing

Please read the whole of John chapter 21. Then read v 1-14 once more - and pray;

Open our eyes Lord that we may see wonderful things in your Word ...

Over the next two Sunday's we will consider the contents of John Chapter 21. This week we focus on verses 1-14, the miraculous catch of fish and the breakfast on the beach; next week, we will consider the restoration of Peter and the preparation for Pentecost and beyond.

When you read the final two verses of **John 20** (v 30-31), you could be forgiven for thinking that you have reached the end of John's gospel. However, although John 20 v 30-31 bring us to the end of the main story, John I think felt the need to provide **a bridge** to the next part of the story, which would begin after the ascension of Jesus and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The next part of the story (which includes you and me) is the story of **the Church** and its bold mission to catch fish (people) for Jesus Christ. It is therefore apt that the bridge which John provides takes us back to the original call to discipleship outlined in Mark 1:17, and the calling to be fishers of men, and to its setting, the Sea of Tiberias/Galilee (21:1). Just as there was a miraculous catch of fish for Peter at the beginning when he was first humbled and then called to follow Jesus (Luke 5 v 1-11), so there was to be a second eye-watering catch when Peter is **recalled**, with Jesus once again telling Peter and the others exactly where to put down their net for success – an astonishing success at that! (v 6).

We have finished with the Jerusalem setting for now where we have been since Palm Sunday. The period of days set for the feast of Passover are complete. It's time to return home – and home is Galilee. It is also where the angel at the tomb and the risen Lord himself had told the disciples to meet him. (Matthew 28: 7 & 10). While they are waiting for what happens next, Peter decides that he is going to go fishing (v 3). Other disciples join him in the boat (v 3). It is worth noting who is with Peter on this occasion. John, our careful writer, recalls who was on board.

There were seven disciples in total (21:2). **Peter** heads the group, and then interestingly we have **Thomas** now back to full joy and commitment. Then we have **Nathaniel** a name we have not heard since the beginning of the gospel story (John 1: 45 ff). He was not actually one of the 12 although some scholars think he may have been the one normally referred to as Bartholomew. This is plausible. Then we have **James** and his brother (our gospel writer) **John**. They like Simon Peter and Andrew had originally been fishermen (Mark 1: 19-20) working alongside their father Zebedee. Finally, there are two other unnamed disciples. I am happy to agree with those who believe these were probably **Andrew** (Simon Peter's brother) and **Philip**. This is because of Andrew's close tie to his brother Peter, and Philip's great friendship with Nathaniel. Philip had introduced Nathaniel to Jesus (John 1:45) and Andrew had brought Simon Peter to Jesus (John 1 v 40-42). I find that there is always a wonderful **symmetry** about the plans of God and the outworking of the gospel. I never cease to be amazed!

One very important point that I want to mention here which will have a significance on what we consider next week is this. This memorable incident is referred to by John as the **third time** (v 14) that the risen Jesus had appeared to his disciples. John is referring to Jesus's

appearances to groups. This is the third time Jesus met with a group of disciples. There had been the previous two meetings behind locked doors in Jerusalem, one with Thomas absent, and one with Thomas present. Now there was this appearance – with seven disciples present. **But** as you read and reread John 21, you realise that although seven are mentioned who all enjoy breakfast with Jesus, the focus is really on **two**. Next week when we look at verses 15-25, they focus entirely on Peter and his restoration, and John the beloved disciple. But even in this week's reading, it is Peter and John who are the key personalities. **John** is the one who recognises the figure on the shore line as Jesus (v 7) and tells **Peter** "It is the Lord". **Peter** is the one who jumps out of the boat into the water and makes his way frantically toward the beach. Peter is the one who drags the net ashore (v 11) from the boat. My point is this. **Peter and John!** I think you will find that as you consider **the bridge** I mentioned earlier, you will be enabled to look ahead to the way Peter and John stood out as leaders in the early Church (see Acts 3 v 1 ff). More about this next week, but this should whet our appetites.

Our writer John, clearly a deeply spiritual man shows once again his spiritual insight as he recognises Jesus. He was the one (not Peter) who had recognised something spiritually profound about the folded grave clothes (20:9). Once again, it is John who suddenly sees the reality of Easter revelation first. **"It's Jesus!"** Then, everything he describes about Peter's ungainly and amusing reaction reinforces all we already know and love about Peter. Peter doesn't care about jumping into the water half dressed! What a great pair of characters – but so different! These two have been chosen to lead the Church of Jesus Christ! Spiritual insight and perception alongside spiritual boldness and freedom from care. Leadership teams under Jesus clearly should comprise of a real mixture of personalities and talents!

I find the eyewitness touches of John in this story to be delightful. He remembered the people who were there in the boat that day. How could he forget? He remembered Peter's comical blundering reaction. He remembered the huge haul of fish – in fact the exact number (v 11), and the fact that the nets "somehow" miraculously stayed intact (v 11). He remembered the smell of the charcoal fire and the aroma of the fish Jesus had already placed upon it. Then there was the *"breaking of the bread"*. Oh yes – the breaking of the bread! What a morning!

AND at **centre of it all**, the most important figure of all – **the Lord Jesus!** What we learn of him here is so encouraging as to almost make one weep for joy. We see a most beautiful side to Jesus who is Lord – risen in power.

First of all, we see Jesus yet again as **servant** Lord. Don't you think that it is quite incredible that the Lord of the Universe, the Word of God, who had so powerfully risen from death, is here making breakfast for a few of his mates! Jesus loved to serve. He is the servant king. He **did not** come to be served **but to serve** and to lay down his life for us all. This is our Lord and God (John 20:28), the servant King. We have a Saviour who was prepared to humbly serve and get his hands dirty as well as pierced for us. He was prepared to be in the kitchen, even if it was an outside kitchen on a beach. He was prepared to wash feet, very dirty feet (John 13:5). And he has set **us** and all who claim to love him a clear example to follow. Listen again to his teaching on the night he was betrayed;

*Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. **I tell you the truth,***

no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them. (John 13: 14-17)

Friends, what more can be said. We follow the Servant King. We are called to serve him as we humbly serve others. Each one of us can be a servant in different ways and at different times, but we are all summoned to have servant hearts and hands. Will you serve? How will you serve? The Lord Jesus had to constantly, repeatedly, drum into the disciples that they were all called to be humble servants. (Mark 10: 43-45) Here alone was kingdom honour and greatness.

Have we got the message? Do we hear Christ's summons to take a bowl and towel? He left us clear teaching based on his own repeated example. You can see why the early Church under the leadership of **Peter and John** became the Servant Church as it served each individual and especially the most vulnerable amongst its community of faith. (Acts 2:44-45) Nothing has changed; this is **our** calling as well – to serve within the Church family, and in the wider world, with humility and the fruit of the Spirit; namely, love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. (Galatians 5:22-23). Even in these present times of isolation and social distancing we can find ways to serve and bless others.

In his first letter Peter significantly wrote;

Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins. Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. (1 Peter 4: 8-10).

How will you personally administer the grace and gifts God has given to you? How will you faithfully serve? John chapter 20 and 21 **proclaim Jesus is Lord!** Jesus is risen! Jesus is King! But even here, amidst resurrection power and glory, there is Jesus the host, Jesus the cook, Jesus the servant.

There is also secondly, Jesus **the friend**, the friend of sinners, the friend of spiritual failures, the friend of disciples willing to give it another go, and in the process become spiritual giants! Jesus was the close friend of these 7 ordinary guys, and the intimacy of his friendship is beautiful to behold. There is first of all Jesus's relaxed call from the shore line to *his friends* in the boat, "*Have you got any fish lads*"? Jesus's words can be translated from the Greek in this down to earth way, and indeed have been in the Good News version of the bible.

Jesus has already got fish on the barbeque and some bread, but asks his friends to pass him a few more – after all they have got loads more in the bulging net! You can almost imagine Jesus and the others counting the fish in unison one by one until they reach the magical number "153", and then laughing raucously together over the ridiculous size of the catch. And to the nervous yet excited disciples, Jesus simply says, "*Come and have breakfast.*" He invites them to relax with him and eat great food. This is a lovely story of warm mutual friendship. By his lovely words and actions, Jesus was saying to these guys, I am your friend.

We too are the friends of Jesus, and although we know him as our Lord, as our God and Creator, as our personal Saviour – we can also know him as *the best of friends*. Heaven will be filled with the friends of Jesus. Can I remind you of something very powerful I shared with you when we were considering the *wounds of Jesus* (20:20) not so long ago. I reminded you then that we are uniquely blessed to know and to love a God who suffers for us and with us. We follow the crucified God; the only **One** who understands human pain and suffering for he has personally tasted it. **One** God who identifies *with all* who struggle and suffer. This is true and further strengthens Christianity's uniqueness, for it alone proclaims "Immanuel – God with us". (Matthew 1:23) **One** with us - Always! The Word became flesh (John 1:14) and suffered in the flesh. His wounds speak powerfully to suffering sinners and persecuted saints.

There is also this **One** God, our God, who is a very kind friend, who looks forward to sitting with us and offering us delicious food and drink at his heavenly banquet. We are to be guests in his heavenly home with our own room specially prepared for us (John 14:1-3). Even now, John tells us that if invited, Jesus will "come into our hearts to live and eat with us." (Rev 3:20)

I am so very grateful for a Saviour and God who understands my pain and suffering. This is truly staggering. Yet, I am also grateful, so very grateful, for a Saviour and God who would sit down with me on a beach and eat fish and chips. This is the real Jesus, an outstanding faithful friend, and yet at the same time a glorious and majestic King. Say with me if you can...

*I found a friend – O such a friend!
He loved me ere I knew him;
He drew me with the cords of love,
and thus he bound me to him:
And round my heart still closely twine
those ties which nought can sever;
For I am his, and He is mine,
For ever and for ever.*

(James Grindlay Small 1817-78)

Next week we will see how Jesus's friendship with Peter is fully restored. That's how Jesus likes friendships – restored, graciously refreshed and bound by a wholesome peace. His death and resurrection make this possible. John believed it was important to show us how this came about so that we could understand why Peter went on to be the leader he was, with John right alongside him, both of them now more than willing to lay down their lives for their *friend and Lord* who they would *serve sacrificially and faithfully* for the rest of their earthly lives.

Let us, for now, in a few moments of sacred silence, recommit our lives to Jesus, the *servant* King and the *friend* of sinners, who is alive and reigns forevermore, and who can provide for us in ways beyond all our imagining, as his resurrection power continues to work within us, urging us onward *to serve* with humility, hope and joy, to the glory of his great name. Amen.

*What a friend I've found, closer than a brother, I have felt your touch, more intimate than lovers.
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, friend forever.
What a hope I've found, more faithful than a mother. It would break my heart to ever lose each other.
Jesus, Jesus, Jesus, friend forever.*

(Martin Smith)