

John 21:1-19

Acts 9:1-6

As I get older, I tend to find that I increasingly seek refuge in what I'm familiar with, rather than seeking new adventures. When it comes to going away on holiday, for instance, when I was in my 20s, I tended to get quite excited about going abroad on long-haul flights, getting to discover places which I'd never been to before. But nowadays, I prefer going to the same old places in this country which I'm already well familiar with, rather than venturing to new, unfamiliar territory. There's something about the safety and security of what we're familiar with.

And it was a bit like that with Jesus' disciples, following on from the resurrection. They had witnessed the empty tomb on Easter Sunday. They had encountered their risen Saviour in the upper room that same day (apart from Thomas who, of course, had to wait another week before he could have this privilege). Yet somehow, despite all *this*, they were still unsure as to what was meant to

happen next. No doubt, they were waiting for the coming of the Holy Spirit, as Jesus had promised them. But in the meantime, what were they to do? They were, in a sense, awaiting further instructions. So, in the midst of all this, Peter suggests to some of his fellow disciples that they go off fishing. That was, after all, what some of them used to do before Jesus had called them to follow him. Amidst the apparent confusion and uncertainty, they chose to go back to their old haunts – to what was *familiar* to *them* – perhaps seeking a sense of safety and security in *this*. It seems that they had not yet been gripped by the reality and implications of what the resurrection of Christ was to have for their lives.

And so, it's in the midst of the *familiar*, that the risen Lord Jesus appears once again to them. Yes, his appearance by the sea of Tiberias was certainly another proof to them that he had indeed been raised from the dead. In writing his Gospel, a key interest of John the evangelist was to set forth the evidence – the *eyewitness* testimony about Jesus – not least when it came to his resurrection from the

dead. But there's even *more* to this particular encounter. Because there was some 'tying up' of loose ends which had to be done. After all, Peter had three times denied that he knew his Lord, even though he had been journeying with him for three years. And he, like most of the other disciples, were nowhere to be seen when their Master hung on the Cross – they had all fled, hiding away in fear. There was some restoration to be done, before Peter and the others could be sent out to be Christ's witnesses to the ends of the earth.

So, at the heart of this encounter with the risen Jesus is *transformation*. When Jesus appears to them, he is in one sense the same (in that he could still be recognised by the beloved disciple), yet at the same time he was somehow different. *His body* was a new creation – physical but transformed. And then *Peter* is transformed through this encounter – his denials of Jesus are transformed into affirmations of love and loyalty to Jesus; this transformation leads to him being commissioned by Jesus to take care of his people; and Peter's calling is transformed – because

Jesus had laid down his life for Peter, so Peter will now, in turn, bring glory to God through his *own* martyrdom.

So, let's just briefly drop in on that conversation between the risen Lord Jesus and Peter. By going back to what was familiar – to his fishing business – Peter was trying to 'keep his head down', as it were. But Jesus draws him back to all that God had begun to do in his life.

Hence the first part of the risen Jesus' message for Peter is, 'remember your call'. A few years previously, when Peter had been going about his daily business of fishing, he had responded to Jesus' call, 'follow me'; so back then, he left behind his fishing business. And *now*, after the resurrection, Jesus once again takes Peter back to that place, reminding him of that original call; the invitation still stands - Peter is *still* invited to leave his fishing nets, to catch people rather than fish. For Peter, his calling had *not* ended now that Christ was risen from the dead; on the contrary, it was just the beginning.

‘Remember your call – don’t go back to your nets – your true calling will shape the future direction of your life’.

Perhaps we *too* need to hear again that call of the risen Christ to us, “Follow me”, and the implications that calling may have for *our* lives. It’s all too easy for us to want to keep *our* heads down as believers, to quietly get on with our lives. But, if we’re wanting to take seriously Christ’s call upon *our* lives to follow him, then he’s not going to allow us simply to retreat back into what we find safe and familiar. That call to follow Jesus is simple, yet profoundly challenging. Wherever he leads us, we are called to follow.

Then the second aspect of Jesus’s message for Peter is, ‘remember your denial’. Jesus takes Peter back to the place where he had failed him, so that he might be restored afresh. The smell of a charcoal fire on the beach would no doubt have brought Peter back to the time a few weeks earlier when he had been waiting around in the courtyard of the High Priest Caiaphas, warming himself by a fire - that place

where he had denied three times that he ever knew Jesus. But *this* time, *again* around a charcoal fire, Peter’s love for Jesus is rekindled. Jesus’ question to Peter, ‘Do you love me?’ – put to him three times – takes him back to his threefold denial of Jesus. It brings Peter to admit his past failure, to confess it, and to receive forgiveness and restoration from the Lord.

Perhaps *we* might consider, ‘in what ways do *we* deny Jesus in *our* daily lives?’ Maybe it’s in our words, actions, thoughts, attitudes, lifestyles, that we sometimes fail to live up to our high calling as his disciples. It maybe that we all too easily ‘hide our heads in the sand’, not wanting other folk to know that we are followers of Christ, perhaps even simply blending in with our contemporary culture, such that we are no longer distinguishable as Christians. Or maybe we all too easily allow ourselves to become possessed by our possessions, seeking our security in money and material things, rather than in the Lord. In the midst of this, Jesus asks the same question of *us*, as he did Peter – ‘Do *you* love *me*?’ And even

more than that, Do you love me more than *these*?' – more than the passing things of this world, more than my desire to live my life *my way*... Jesus asked Peter whether he loved him more than his old way of life – his fishing business. Jesus challenges *us* to re-order *our* priorities in life, reminding us that our lives are to be lived for *him* and his purposes – 'Lord of our lives, to live for Christ alone' (as the hymn puts it). So, what might this look like in practice for each one of *us*?

And the third aspect of Jesus's message for Peter is, 'remember your commission'. The night out on the sea without catching any fish, followed by his encounter with the risen Lord Jesus, was a reminder to Peter of his original call some years earlier, when Jesus had declared to him, "Follow me, and I will make you fish for people." Now Peter is to be transformed from fisherman to *shepherd* – someone who will tend Jesus' lambs and feed his sheep – a pastor modelled on Christ himself, the Good Shepherd. Peter must have thought that his denial of Jesus disqualified him from being a true *disciple* of

Jesus, let alone being a key leader in the fledgling Church. After what he had done, how could he possibly be of any use to the Lord? But through God's grace, he is restored and re-commissioned in the Lord's service. So far, he has been a disciple, a *follower* of Jesus; now he is to be an *apostle* for the Lord, too – someone sent out by the Lord to be his witness in the world.

Perhaps *we* need to hear again Christ's commission to *us*, to be *not* only disciples, but also *apostles* – those sent out by him to be a 'transforming presence' in the places we find ourselves in our day-to-day lives. In what ways do *we* enable others to meet Jesus? Just as Peter's life was dramatically changed by Jesus, so Jesus continues to change lives today. So, will *we* allow Christ to rekindle in *our* hearts a fresh devotion to him and his cause?

When we consider this amazing encounter with the risen Jesus, we're reminded that the resurrection makes a difference. No, even more than that, the resurrection makes *all* the difference. The

resurrection of Jesus Christ changes *everything*. We simply can't carry on living as though there's no hope or purpose in life. We can no longer live self-focused lives, but rather we are called to live *Christ-centred* lives.

The resurrection is a historical event which has implications for every person in the present. When Paul encountered the risen and exalted Christ on the Damascus Road, *his* life was radically transformed. He discovered that, in the light of Easter, everything is different. Because Jesus is alive and is Lord of all, *we* can encounter him powerfully each day of *our* lives, just as his first disciples and Paul had done 2000 years ago. The resurrection is about a present and personal encounter with the risen Lord Jesus. So, what might it mean for each of *us* to live in the light of the resurrection of Christ?

Let us pray:

Living Lord Jesus, we thank you that you call us to follow you. Help us to be faithful to that calling – seeking to follow where you lead, to live distinctive lives in the midst of this present age, and to daily be renewed by your transforming Spirit. Amen.