

Easter 3 2019 John 21: 1-19

Today's Gospel lesson is one of the most dramatic of the post-Resurrection narratives. John 21 captures the powerful rehabilitation of Simon Peter. At the heart of the story is Peter, the bold and brash who made wild and wonderful promises, only to fall short in the moment of truth when he acted as if he did not even know Jesus. We would like to be critical of Peter, but, in our heart of hearts, know how often we have done the same thing!

The early church certainly remembered the night of Peter's colossal failure. Peter was standing beside a charcoal fire near the house of the High Priest Caiaphas, where Jesus was on trial for his life. On three occasions Peter denied that he even knew who Jesus was. The story of Peter could have ended in that courtyard were it not for Jesus' determination to bring about the rehabilitation of Peter.

Like Peter, we have set out with great intentions only to fall short of our goals, settling for much less than what we first earnestly desired.

Our Gospel lesson begins with a scene of weary fisherman ending an unsuccessful night. Suddenly a stranger appears and gives them some unrequested advice on how they ought to fish. What he says does not make sense but they do it anyway and suddenly their nets are full. If that is not reason enough to assure them of the Lord's presence, Jesus invites them to the shore where he has prepared a kind of Eucharist with bread and fish, cooked over a charcoal fire.

But the critical moment in our Gospel lesson is not breakfast on the beach with Jesus, no matter how charming that story is, but rather the momentous dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Imagine the fear and humiliation Peter must have experienced when he was suddenly in the presence of the Lord he had denied in front of that other charcoal fire in the High Priest's courtyard.

And then Jesus asks Peter: Do you love me? Three times Peter responds: Lord, you know I love you ... assuming you can overlook that little breach of loyalty when your life was on the line and danger filled the air.

The Early Church remembered this important encounter because they saw themselves in this exchange. And we should too. For no matter how intensely we may feel we love the Lord, we are always subject to the same moments of weakness and failure. How important it is that we remember that the love of God is greater than our ability to deserve it or live up to it.

This conversation between Jesus and Peter captures two critical and essential events. the restoration of Peter, who had denied his Lord three times in the courtyard of the High Priest, and the renewal of the sacred task that Jesus had given to his disciples to go to the whole world and share the message of God's unconditional love and acceptance.

You remember that Jesus asked Peter: Simon son of John, do you love me more than these? Jesus meant do you love me more than boats, nets, fish, food, family, and friends? At Peter's lowest moment he had indicated that he loved his life and his skin more than anything. In his denial Peter stated that he did not want to die. He loved the things of this world more than he wanted to follow Jesus to what was clearly a premature death.

That is the challenge we all must face. What is important for us? Do we like Jesus or do we love him. There is a critical difference and at this point we see Jesus move away from fishing language in order to embrace the critical call to a caring, shepherding ministry.

Our Gospel lesson reminds us that we are to care for those around us, particularly those who are in need. We are to minister to both the physically hungry and the spiritually hungry. Within our circle of family and friends, we are to sustain and encourage each other, always in the name of Jesus Christ. And if we are parents or grandparents, we are to fulfill our duty not just to the physical care of children in our trust, but also to their spiritual growth and development. That means we will care as much for our children's spiritual and faith development as we care for their nutrition and physical welfare.

There is urgency to all of this. It is a terrible thing to reject God's invitation. But it is a worse thing to have never received it. Jesus final words to Peter were "Follow me". Like Peter, as a church, we are called to be in the world for others and to invite people to enter into a life-altering relationship with Jesus Christ. The Diocese has a scheme Transforming Church, Transforming Lives and encourages Discipleship and the creation of confident disciples in daily life covers everything we do.

The vision here is of a community committed to lifelong learning, and to equipping its members to 'love and serve the Lord' in their neighbourhood, workplace, home, school and elsewhere. This goal places both prayer and confidence right at the heart of the strategy, and poses the question, 'How can we create a culture of spiritual growth?'

I love the fact that when the risen Jesus told his first followers to make disciples of all nations, he took them back home, to Galilee, to where they had

started out with him. They had an adventure ahead, but what they learnt there, through a pattern of trial and error, grace and forgiveness, risk and reward, was the way to do it. If we're going to make disciples today, we need to keep reading the Gospels, keep going back to Galilee in our mind's eye. That's where it begins and that is where we are as a parish now.

Earlier in this morning's gospel we heard how Peter took a plunge in faith into the water to reach Jesus. In preparing this sermon I came across a reflection by Martyn Percy, Dean of Christ Church, Oxford.

*“One of the strange things about the Bible is that there is no real example of successful swimming prior to the resurrection. Water symbolizes the chaos and overwhelming. But after Easter, it is different. Peter can take the plunge. The resurrection appearances invite the disciples to take risks. The church will be advanced by those who can learn to swim, or even to try walk on water. There is a Venetian proverb that says, “The critic stands on the side but the artist swims in the sea”. In our resurrection faith, we are invited to take the plunge, not because we are rash, but because God now beckons us to join him in a new life of adventure and hope”.*

So, it is for us as we experience the transforming power of the Resurrection.

Amen.