

Third Sunday of Easter

Are there times that at the end of a long and busy day all we want to do is to go home and take our shoes off? Are there times when we have experienced things that we could not quite understand, and we felt the need to go back to what was familiar and sort those things out? Perhaps that was how Peter was feeling when he told the others that he was going fishing. He needed to go home, take his shoes off and go back to something he felt really comfortable about. And hanging over Peter was the guilt that he felt about denying that he knew Jesus. It was when Peter went back fishing, in this homely, ordinary activity that Jesus appears to him again. And perhaps it is in the ordinariness of our lives, in places where we feel comfortable that we are most likely to meet Jesus too.

As we consistently find in John's gospel there are many little things to be discovered in the way that John tells his story, signs if you like, that point to something else. There are seven disciples that go fishing that night. John might be suggesting that we see the whole church being represented by this little group of seven. That they set out in the darkness by themselves was a formula for failure. Nobody can successfully do the work of the church in the dark without Jesus with them.

It is with the light of morning that they see Jesus on the shore asking them if they have caught any fish. There is a new kind of intimate relationship that Jesus has with them even before they recognise him. He calls them friends and tells them to throw the net to the starboard side. It must have brought back memories of what happened when some of those disciples were first called to follow Jesus. It is the miraculous catch of fish, not his better eyesight, that moves the beloved disciple to recognise Jesus on the shore. But it is Peter who jumps into the water. He is moved not so much by faith but by love. He cannot wait to be with Jesus again. And it is his leadership that comes through so clearly in what follows. The other disciples come to the shore after him towing the net and the fish.

Peter is asked by Jesus to bring to him some of the fish that he has caught. To me it is a beautiful reminder that Jesus uses what we have to do the work that he does through us. Peter draws the net to the shore. It is full of fish; but the net does not break. Peter is the one who holds the church together in unity. We are told that there were 153 fish in the net. However we might interpret that number, it seems to be a way of saying that there is room for everyone in the net that is the Church. Jesus feeds the disciples with bread and fish, the food that he used to feed the five thousand. Just as that miraculous feeding was a foretaste of the Eucharistic banquet, so

could this breakfast on the lakeside be seen in the same way. Jesus feeds the disciples here as he will continue to feed them and all of us with the Eucharistic food that is himself.

After the meal while they are still gathered around that charcoal fire, Jesus speaks to Peter in a way that both challenges and heals him and makes him ready for mission. It was around another charcoal fire that Peter had three times denied that he knew Jesus. Now he is asked three times if he loves Jesus. Peter does not try to say that his love for Jesus is greater than any other disciple's love for him. But with deep humility he can say that Jesus knows his love for him. "Lord, you know everything; you know I love you." After each of his affirmations of love Peter is commissioned by Jesus to feed his lambs and sheep. Peter is being sent out to continue the work of the Good Shepherd. Although Jesus makes no mention of Peter's sinful denials, Peter knows that he has been forgiven. He knows too that he is being sent out to be an agent of mercy and forgiveness for others.

What does that say about who we are as Church today? Surely before we do anything else, Jesus is asking us if we love him. It is our love for the Lord that draws us towards Jesus. It is our love for Jesus that opens ours

hearts to his Spirit of love. And it is his love for us that empowers us to go out and to act in his name