

**Sermon Easter 3 by Andrew 5 May 2019 Come and have breakfast!**

**John 21: 1-9**

**This is a great Gospel story, because of all the Resurrection appearances this is maybe the most vivid. You can almost smell the fish. Come and have breakfast!**

**This is real. And John underlines this by giving us his cast list right at the start. We've got Peter, whose betrayal of Jesus was probably still painfully fresh in Peter's troubled mind; Nathaniel, who once famously asked: Can anything good come out of Nazareth? (well, he has his answer now), Thomas the twin, and James and John, those sons of Zebedee, those sons of thunder whose Momma had all those plans for thrones and crowns – big career plans to boast about for her boys – only here they all are back at the day job. None of it had worked out as any of them had planned. Do you know that feeling?**

**Then, almost to add insult to injury, either they've lost the knack with all this wandering about the countryside preaching, or the fish just aren't biting, but after a whole night – hour after weary, boring, fruitless hour – they've caught nothing. And I think we know that feeling too. I do recall some actual fishing incidents with my Dad where nothing was caught, night fishing – feeling around inside a tin of maggots in the dark to put one on a hook (and thinking that all this male bonding, father/son stuff was greatly overrated if this is what it meant), and the indignity of fishing in the River Tweed, my Dad and I with our proper rods, waiting for hours for a trout, only to watch my sister come along with a toy rod and before our very eyes pull out a beauty in less than five minutes. Fishing can be very frustrating.**

**But long nights, long days where nothing happens in real life are even more so. And there isn't a human being on the planet who hasn't known that. Life's unfair, or it feels like that; people don't always get what they deserve. Years of struggle sometimes do end up in disappointment and bitterness – that sense of, “Lord, I've hung in there in this lousy job, this difficult marriage, this terrible time or place or experience, and I've got nothing to show for it”.**

**But the wonder of this story is that suddenly the sun comes up, and a voice is calling you – and John, who keeps the best line for himself (for which you can't blame him) cries out: It is the Lord! And then it's all joy and you can hear the charcoal fire crackling, and the fish sizzling and smell the bread baking. And then with that masterly economy of words that makes John such a genius, he says “Jesus took the bread and gave it to them, the same with the fish”.**

**He took, he gave – and instantly they and all of us are transported back to feedings of 5,000 with a wee boy's lunch, and so many roadside meals, and the Last Supper itself. So it wasn't all for nothing. It was for this. It was for sharing and going on sharing a life that could not and never can, nor ever will, be suppressed – the life of Jesus, and the life of the Risen Jesus in me. It's a great moment, a Hollywood moment almost. Roll the credits – 'cause we're done now, cue the Hollywood choir. What a fantastic ending.**

Only John just has to spoil it. Because we're not done. When they've finished breakfast: "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" Poor Peter, who's barely had time to wipe the crumbs off his mouth is cornered. This is that awkward moment when you can't get away from who you are, or what your history's made you.

Rather pointlessly perhaps John remarked that when Jesus appeared and called the disciples, Peter, stripped for work, was naked. But he's much more naked now. As are we all. Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me? And Peter has to make a three-fold affirmation, a three-fold "Yes, Lord" until he means it from his heart, from the very roots of his being, undoing those three denials of: "I don't know him. I don't know him. I do not know this man." So now he can say: Yes, Lord, you know everything. You know that I love you.

It could not be more intense. If we were in the cinema we'd be on the edge of our seats. But such an important transformation has taken place here. Peter wasn't much of a shepherd before, but he is now; he wasn't much of a Rock on which to build anything, but he is now. And he's ready.

So the Resurrection is an encounter with the Jesus who transforms us, the Jesus who challenges us – albeit usually very gently – to be the best of ourselves. And who invites us to let ourselves be taken by the Spirit maybe to places we'd rather not go, but strengthened, toughened even, by the knowledge that just when you think you've got to the end of a chapter, God has more to write in and through you.

The dark fruitless night is never the end, and the mountaintop moments aren't the end either, but through all of it we're on our way. We're the pilgrim people of God, and we encourage each other along the way with these stories of endings that somehow turn out to be new beginnings. And the Revelation story lifts our eyes to see the furthest horizon of all that we can imagine. The slaughtered Lamb becomes the glorified Lamb, the dead Jesus becomes the Jesus who serves you breakfast, the faithless, terrified Peter becomes the Rock on which a Church is built. So what might he do in us? What could he not do? All our stories, it seems, are wonderfully unfinished. Until in the end we see that vision of the Lamb, and overwhelmed by love and adoration, we all fall on our faces and worship.