

Beginning Again - Jesus and Peter on the beach (John 21)

Last time we were in church we spent the whole time thinking about the life of Peter

Remember the canoe at the parade service? Sadly not even Kieth got a photo of my canoe over the baptistry but did get this one of us trying to haul it up to the balcony!

That by the way was the last time we were in the building together!!

Well we are thinking about Peter again today.

Two weeks ago was Easter. Jesus rose from the dead and he appeared a number of times, in different settings to a number of his followers.

One of those occasions was especially significant for Peter.

He didn't really know what to do with himself. The disciples had been in a sort of self-inflicted lockdown. Partly because they were afraid and partly because the risen Jesus had told them to wait for him. One day, Peter, either hungry, bored, or out of money, announces that he is going to start fishing again. Waiting for Messiah to appear did not pay the bills or put food on the table. Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee (James and John), and two other unnamed disciples decide to go with him.

I used my outside exercise earlier today to help us think about this occasion

At dawn, Jesus calls to the distraught disciples from the shore, asking if they had caught anything. "No." Jesus instructs them to cast the net on the right side of the boat. At this point they hadn't recognised that it was Jesus so I am mildly surprised that they followed this stranger's advice. But they do so and catch so many fish they cannot pull the net into the boat. Upon seeing the great catch of fish, John (the beloved disciple) announces his belief that the man on shore is Jesus. Peter looks up, sees that it is Jesus and leaps into the water and swims ashore while the other disciples slowly drag the net to shore from the boat.

By the time they get the fish ashore they find Jesus cooking a fish breakfast over a charcoal fire.

Peter would have already seen the Lord at least two or three times but this occasion is special for him!

In all the resurrection appearance Jesus gives what is needed. To Mary, comfort; to the disciples on the road to Emmaus it was instruction; to the disciples a commission: to Peter critical restoration.

Takes Simon away from the others; the beloved disciple following at a distance. They are probably walking slowly along the shore. The smell of the fire is still clinging to his clothes just as it would have done a few weeks earlier when Peter was keeping himself warm by a fire whilst denying that he knew Jesus - not once but three times.

So here they are Jesus and Peter, walking on a beach together and Jesus asks a question, a question that goes to the heart of it all: Do you love me? not once but three times.

Here is the key for all Christian ministry, yours and mine, lay and ordained, full time or part time, whether a quiet back row member of a prayer group or a platform speaker at huge festivals. If you are going to do anything as a follower of Jesus, this is what it is built on - a love for Jesus.

You have probably let him down many times but do you love him. Jesus will seek you out, he will ask you the question, maybe you can hear His voice right now, Do you love me?

If we had been Jesus we would have probably given up on Peter

Jesus seems to have had a clear purpose in turning up on this morning – to restore Peter. To give Peter the chance to begin again.

Beginning again with Jesus will mean we have to face up to our past.

Peter only restored as he was prepared to face up to the past - Where do you stand with me now, Simon?

John, who wrote this gospel, who was following at a distance wrote in a later letter. if we confess our sins he is faithful and just and will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9

Do you love me

Beginning again with Jesus will mean falling in love again with Jesus.

Do you love me more than these - Yes Lord you know that I love you - Feed my lambs

Do you truly love me - Yes Lord you know that I love you - Take care of my sheep

Do you love me - (hurt) Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you. - Feed my sheep

3rd time Peter was deeply 'pained' – John uses same word of childbirth pain

Threefold challenge followed by threefold confession is followed by a threefold commission. Peter's declared love for Jesus needs to be translated into action. The fisherman to become a shepherd.

Beginning again with Jesus will mean fulfilling a task

not as penance, you get to be involved in the purposes of God
feed my lambs
take care of my sheep
feed my sheep

Peter had a task to fulfil and boy did he get on with it. Before long he is preaching to thousands, the church is being established. God's kingdom is advancing!

In all the Resurrection appearances of Jesus we have a picture of Jesus' followers being shell-shocked; confused; troubled; scared; hiding; and basically not really knowing what to do next. Yet all along, Jesus had had it in mind to use them to change the world. They had come to think it was all over, Jesus was to convince them it was just beginning!

Peter's failure didn't mean that he was now to be assigned to a lesser task but rather to get back involved in handling Jesus' own affairs.

What projects have you been labouring over? And getting nowhere? Watch for the dawn, watch for the figure on the beach. Listen for his voice, and then do whatever he tells you.