

Sermon	Year C	3 rd Sunday of Easter
St Michael's	14/04/2013	

Well what a difference two weeks can make? Just over two weeks ago we were in the depth and despair of Good Friday as Jesus was nailed to the cross. His mother and a handful of onlookers distraught as they watched His final moments. And then on to Easter Sunday – the resurrection – the raising from the dead - hope – hope as Christ is risen.

And now in this final chapter of John, we hear echo's back to the earthly ministry of Jesus and forward to the life of the Church after the ascension. Back to the time in Galilee, with Peter and his friends going fishing – Jesus revealing himself as he had done throughout – He feeds them – he offers them forgiveness – challenge – and finally he commissions them.

In these early stories of the calling of the disciples, the disciples must have at times wondered what was happening. These times must have been exciting, challenging, frustrating at times especially when they did not understand the big picture. They must also have been unsure, uncertain, questioning, how long can this go on for? Will it end? You know yourself when you undertake a risk, or do something new yes it can be exciting, stretching you out of comfort zone, but then occasionally reality steps in – it grounds you whilst at the same time asking some difficult questions.

When life gets difficult, when we become lost, confused, and afraid, when the changes of life are not what we wanted or think we deserve, we tend to run away - back to the way it was before – to something safe, something familiar.

In our Gospel reading, Peter and six others have returned to the sea. They have left Jerusalem. They have come home to the Sea of Tiberias, the place where it all began. Discipleship, the upper room, the cross, the empty tomb, the house with its locked doors are some 80 miles to the South. Peter decides to go fishing. He knows how to do that. It is familiar and comfortable. Perhaps it takes him back to life before Jesus. The others are quick to join him.

My hunch, however, is that Peter is not really trying to catch fish as much as he is fishing for answers. We can leave the places and even the people of our life but we can never escape ourselves or our life. Peter may have left Jerusalem but he cannot get away from three years of discipleship, the last supper, the arrest, a charcoal fire, denials, a crowing rooster. He cannot leave behind the cross, the empty tomb, the echoes of "Peace be with you." So he fishes for answers.

What have I done? What were those three years about? Who was Jesus? Where is he? Who am I? What will I do now? Where will I go? What will happen to me? Peter is searching for meaning, a way forward, a place in life. Peter is what you might call dark night fishing. And in our lives, we have all spent time dark night fishing; asking the same questions as Peter, looking for our place in life, seeking peace, and some sense of understanding and meaning. More often than not dark night fishing happens in the context of the failures, losses, and sorrows of our lives. It happens when we come face to face with the things we have done and left undone. We have all been there, fishing for answers in the darkness. But there as he fishes, he Jesus finds him -
And if Peter initially left his nets to follow Jesus in the throes of a kind of hero worship, he now takes up the charge Jesus gives him without any illusions.

Jesus gives Peter his hard and dangerous task of bringing the Christian Community, the Church into existence, he does not say to Peter, "I love you and trust you" or "I love you" or simply "I trust you". Instead Jesus asks Peter one very simple question "Do you love me?", because for such a role as the one that Jesus has for Peter, he must be sure that above everything else he loves Jesus. He is asking for a commitment from Peter - It is only when Peter acknowledges that loving God is about giving, not just about getting, that he can play the part that God has for him. And what a message that has for each one of us here. That being in a relationship with God is not just about what we get – but more importantly about what we give – and that means in its broadest sense, not just on a Sunday or an evening in the week – it is what must happen everyday.

In today's New Testament readings we hear Saul's meeting with Jesus on the road to Damascus, like Peter's meeting with the risen Christ is not primarily a joyous occasion. Jesus's words to Paul are almost harsh. Nothing about forgiveness or love, but a ruthless forcing on Paul of the understanding that to persecute his followers is to persecute Jesus. It is, if you like, the other side of Peter's commission, to love Jesus by loving the 'children'. Just as Peter had to learn, at last, to let go of all illusions of greatness that he had cherished when he started to follow Jesus, so Paul, too, has to let go of all the things he thought he knew and start again. The dazzling light that brings darkness is the symbol of what will happen to Paul, the journey that he will have to undertake, letting go of his own sight and learning to see with different eyes, Jesus' eyes.

Could this be some kind of a parable for the church? Do we as a Church actually need to see things through Jesus' eyes rather than our own? Could it be that we are not actually called always to be right, but simply to demonstrate by our own gratitude and love that God can and will forgive? If God can go on loving and forgiving the Church which has been such a sorry mess for so much of its history, then His power to love and forgive must be enormous indeed. God has forgiven his people, out of his great love for us.

If we look at Peter, he was posed an important question, "Do you love me?", in replying yes then how can we demonstrate our love for him. Today – Tomorrow. That is surely the question for each of us as we continue to grow in relationship with our Lord, who came to earth to serve, to know first hand what it is like to be human, to experience human relationships, our pain, who died to save us, who is now risen – glorified with his father in

Heaven. What we have to do is to be grateful, to demonstrate our love for him and pass it on.

Amen