

## ON THE BEACH

### Gone Fishing!

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee.<sup>[a]</sup> It happened this way: <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus<sup>[b]</sup>), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> “I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them, and they said, “We’ll go with you.” So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

<sup>4</sup> Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

<sup>5</sup> He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”

“No,” they answered.

<sup>6</sup> He said, “Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.” When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

<sup>7</sup> Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,” he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. <sup>8</sup> The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>9</sup> When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

<sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish you have just caught.” <sup>11</sup> So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. <sup>12</sup> Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” None of the disciples dared ask him, “Who are you?” They knew it was the Lord. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

## Jesus Reinstates Peter

<sup>15</sup> When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?”

“Yes, Lord,” he said, “you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my lambs.”

<sup>16</sup> Again Jesus said, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

He answered, “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Take care of my sheep.”

<sup>17</sup> The third time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?”

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, “Do you love me?” He said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep. <sup>18</sup> Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.” <sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, “Follow me!”

<sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, “Lord, who is going to betray you?”) <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he asked, “Lord, what about him?”

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me.” <sup>23</sup> Because of this, the rumour spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, “If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? (John 21 v 1 – 25)

It had begun on the beach a few years before. They were cleaning their nets after being out on the lake at night. The Master came, followed by crowds of people, so he asked to borrow a boat. He borrowed Simon’s boat. That’s what he was called then, Simon. The Master sat down in the boat, now a little way

off from the shore and began to teach the people. When he'd finished, the Master suggested they go out on the lake and go fishing. Simon thought it a very strange thing for the Master to say – what did he know about fishing?

Every fisherman knew you fished at night – which they'd done and caught nothing, but the Master was strangely persuasive, so they did, they went fishing...again! The catch was extraordinary – almost too big for their nets, and that changed it for Simon. He and his companions left their nets and became followers of the Master. And so began an extraordinary adventure.

The Master gave him a new name: Cephas – Peter. He saw the Master turn ordinary water into the best wine at a wedding. He watched as Jesus met and spoke with the wrong kinds of people: women, Samaritans, lepers, adulterers, prostitutes, tax collectors, the sick, the poor, the outcast. He served food to crowds of people on a hill when all they had for food was five loaves and two fish provided by a young boy. He was at Mary and Martha's house when the Master called their brother, Lazarus, out of his tomb.

He was the only one of the Master's followers to have the courage to step out of the boat and walk to Jesus on the water. He was ready to defend the Master with his life. But it had all gone so horribly wrong. The Master was arrested, tried, flogged and crucified. And Peter, so confident and bold, had denied he ever knew the Master, let alone been one of his followers. Now, he is on the beach again, next to his boat, ready to fish, and things are looking very uncertain.

Here's a question for you: Have you noticed yet that nothing lasts forever? Have you noticed that everything is, in fact, temporary? However good something is, in the end, it doesn't last. If that's true, then it may also be that however bad something is, ultimately it doesn't last? Time, it turns out, waits for no-one! We know that, however good something was, we simply cannot go back in time to what was. We also know that we can never be who we once were, back in our past, however much we might like the thought of it. But, friends, sometimes, perhaps, we need the past to come to us again, here and now.

As followers of the Master, Simon Peter and the other disciples had seen some extraordinary things, things they would never have thought possible. For the past three years they had lived a very different life to the one they knew before their encounter, on the beach, with the Master.

Some people suggest they should never have gone back to their boats, to their fishing, to Galilee. Have you ever wondered what it must have been like for the disciples after Jesus was crucified? However much Jesus had tried to prepare them, his crucifixion came as a great shock. They had not only lost their leader, but their inspiration, their vision and...their friend. They were in a state of utter confusion; it did not make any sense. They were in a heightened state of fear as they hid from the authorities. And, even though Jesus, the Master, visited them on occasions, some still doubted, and their joy at seeing him was tinged with questions: how do you deal with one you know has died, seeing them in the room with you, very much alive again?

Perhaps, truth is, they needed to go back to Galilee, to their boats, to fishing – it was after all the thing they knew best. Perhaps, somehow, it brought them closer to the Master, the place where it all began, carrying his presence – a presence they desperately needed in these moments. Perhaps, for Peter, something else too, might have been going on, for this was the place of one of his greatest moments.

They had just witnessed the most extraordinary picnic. There were well over 5,000 people present, and no food. Perhaps not the greatest planning, but a great opportunity for a miracle and a revelation of who the Master really was. With just the lunch offered by a young boy of five loaves and two fish, the Master fed everyone with enough left to feed the disciples too. The Master made them get in their boat to cross the lake while he went to pray. A storm terrified the hardy fishermen only made worse when they saw a ghost walking to them. The Master tells them not to be afraid because it is him. Peter, speaking before thinking, challenges the Master: “If it’s you, tell me to come to you on the water.” Despite everything, he did walk on the water towards Jesus, for a moment at least. Now he’s here again, by the lake, but without the Master.

I wonder if you know what that’s like? I think I do. Maybe. At least a little bit. If I look back over my life, I think I can see times when I would understand that God was close and present and active. My mum died on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020, 50 years to the day after her husband, my dad died on 1<sup>st</sup> July 1970. My dad was a vicar with no home of his own and little money. In fact, when he died, the current account he had was in the red. Three months before he died, his best friend helped him to take out a life insurance policy, which on his death paid out

enough money for mum to buy a house for us to live in – since we had to vacate the vicarage. Perhaps in a tragedy, God was providing for the family.

From the age of 13, I wanted to be a PE teacher. That's what I trained for and that's what, for 10 years, I did. But there was always something else in my heart – something I wasn't sure about until I came to Crawley. The journey into ministry, one that many of you have shared with me, was not as straightforward as I'd have liked, and when I was turned down the first time, I was ready to give up. But something burned in my heart: "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart." (Psalm 37v4) And, twenty-five years later, here I am.

It wasn't until I'd said yes to being the minister here at CBC that I realised what a challenge the redevelopment project really was! But what a journey that turned out to be friends!

There were some high and some lows, but we walked it together and God, it seems, made our path straight. We saw God's hand at work in so many ways. At the end of that journey, when we had moved into this building, there was a part of me that thought I could do anything!!!

2020, this past year, has been very different. My friend and colleague Clare, lost her dad in March 2020, as the pandemic began to take hold. The wedding we had planned for, hoped for and anticipated took a very different form and was beautiful, but it was in the absence of family and friends. Three days before that lovely wedding, mum died, suddenly and unexpectedly – what a shock that was. Not a month after that, our friend and colleague, Andrew lost his battle with cancer. Then Lesley, friend and colleague, lost her father-in-law, Colin's dad. In January I contracted COVID and found myself in the ED at the hospital.

In March I answered the phone to Denise to hear the heart-breaking news that Richard had collapsed and died at home. Two weeks ago, on a Zoom call, we were told that Larry, Lisa's dad in California is dying and has little time left to live. We are desperately trying to work out if it is possible to visit in the middle of a pandemic. Clare, Ian and Megan; Yvonne, Ben and James; Denise, Joshua and George; Lesley, Colin, Hannah and David, feel their pain, but we all feel it. And, truth is, right now, I'm with Peter, back on the beach. I have questions. Lots of them.

I have times when I'm confused and bewildered and wondering what, if anything, it all means. And, forgive me, probably like Peter, I wonder about the Master. Perhaps, in truth, we can be kind to Peter, because in truth, we all find ourselves on the beach sometimes. My best guess is that you understand what I'm talking about. What once was, now isn't, and some things cause us to ask again some big and painful questions.

Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: <sup>2</sup> Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. <sup>3</sup> "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. (John 21 v 1-3)

Perhaps Peter goes fishing because, in truth, that's what he knows best, perhaps it's all he knows. Perhaps, in all the confusion and uncertainty, he at least knows he's good at fishing; at least he can do that! And, much more mundanely, he's got to eat!

Perhaps too, Peter recognizes something else. The way John writes it: "I'm going out to fish," is more of an invitation than a statement. More like "Who's up for some fishing?" Peter was not on his own and he was not alone either. Is that not the beauty of church? We are not on our own, and we are not alone. Friends, thank you for every way you find to support one another.

To be honest, I'm not entirely sure how these things work – actually I have no idea how it works. But, what we see as Peter and the others go fishing, is that the Master is close, and he is coming to meet them. He's going to cook them breakfast, on the beach. He's going to be with them, to give them space around a fire where no-one need speak, where they can just be with their thoughts and questions. What a life group meeting that must have been!

That the Master comes to them on the beach, a place some might suggest they should never have been, tells of the Master's compassion for those he loves. And maybe it tells you that the Master comes to you, wherever you are. He meets those who've gone fishing. He meets people on the beach.

Meeting people on the beach is the kind of thing the Master still does. When the disciples are asking the question: "How can we live now, without Jesus?" Jesus comes to them to help them.

As we read this story together over the coming weeks, we will see that nowhere does Jesus condemn them for being on the beach. We, perhaps, are quick to judge when others find life difficult or challenging. We may even suggest that if they had a strong faith, a person wouldn't be wondering where God is or why things happen the way they do. And they certainly wouldn't go back to the beach – the safe places, the old ways of being, the things they know how to do.

Perhaps, for Peter at least, the Master meets him on the beach where there is a fire cooking breakfast, precisely because he wants to meet Peter in his deepest pain – the memory of his denial over a different fire. The Master meets Peter and the others where they are: on the beach. He meets them where they are, because he loves them too much to leave them there. And the same is true for me and you.

Peter first met the Master on the beach, a meeting that changed his life. Now, the Master will meet Peter on the beach again, a meeting that will change his life again. The Master has some work to do with Peter, and maybe the Master has some work to do with you too. There's a simple prayer I love: "Father, meet us where we are, and move us closer to where you want us to be." Maybe, if we're on the beach, we could have the courage to pray that prayer.

Peter has gone fishing, but the Master is wanting to meet him. How about you?

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