

Sermon – Easter 3

John 21:1-19

*May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be
pleasing in your sight, O Lord, my strength and my Redeemer.*

Like clockwork, on the last day of the holidays, at probably about 5 in the evening my Mum would say “It’s back to work with a bump tomorrow then”. At the time, I couldn’t quite work out the significance of that slightly sing-songy tone she used as she said it. Now, as a parent myself, I recognise it as tired relief.

Back to work with a bump. That’s where we find Peter, Thomas, Nathanael and the sons of Zebedee and a couple of un-named others in our Gospel reading, drifting around in a boat, on the sea of Galilee. We could allow our gaze to travel to all sorts of places in this scene at

the end of John. To that breakfast on the beach. To that conversation afterwards, where Jesus restores Peter. To the call and challenge he brings Peter. But this morning, let's stay there on the boat. The disciples are back to reality. Back to reality after the drama of the empty tomb, and the whirlwind of joy as Jesus appeared to them in locked rooms, and the huge brain-bending twist at the end of the tail, that dramatic turn from failure to triumph, from tragedy to victory. Back now to fishing.

Because what else can they do? What else can they do but the immediate thing they know *how* to do? What else can they do but tie familiar knots in familiar rope, and scan familiar waters looking for any sign of fish. It's what they do. We have known them through the gospel as disciples, but as much as they are disciples they are also fishermen. So they return to what they know. Back to earth with a bump.

And *quite* a bump because for whatever reason, perhaps because of lack of practice and blunted skill or because the conditions aren't

quite right somehow, it is a long and frustrating night with no catch. As the distant horizon lightens, there is still no fish. Frustration and anger fill the boat, but fish do not. Over in the distance, on the shore, a figure appears. At first, they ignore him, continuing their work but after a while they catch his voice, carried by the wind, and they hear to their considerable irritation that he is offering them advice about their work. What does this figure know about *their* work? What right does he have to offer any kind of commentary. It is an insult, perhaps one we can recognise. There always seem to be people who know how to do our work better than we do, don't there? Perhaps more so than ever in this age of twitter, where comment is democratised so that we are all experts in geopolitics, or immunisation policy. Of course, we have no authority to comment, but that doesn't stop us trying. I have of late been getting into debates on twitter about cricket with professional pundits, imagining that they have some interest in my inexpert opinion on the disaster that is English test cricket. It is unwise, and I should stay in my lane.

Perhaps this figure on the shore should also stay in his lane. But he doesn't. He advises them how to fish. And for some reason, perhaps because they are out of other options, they go along with his idea.

And their work is transformed. Their net is full.

Among the many transformations we find in the gospels after the resurrection, this is perhaps the quietest and the most unexciting. A load of fishermen doing what they do every day. Not out there changing the world but returning to their day job, and having a rather more successful day because of an encounter with the risen Christ.

But this is not advice from a random armchair expert. This is an encounter with the Lord of all creation, the one who created fish, and nets, and boats. The disciples have taken advice from the designer of the whole thing.

An encounter with the risen Jesus will revolutionise a life. It can change a heart from one like Saul's which lives to persecute into one like Paul's which lives to love. An encounter with the risen Christ can

cause a dramatic change of calling, and it can, and has, led people to the ends of the earth to share the gospel in the most enthralling and dramatic of ways. It can lead people to devote their lives to thinking great thoughts and, dare I suggest, write great books.

All of this is a possibility when a life encounters the risen Christ and then walks in step with him. We may be called to new things elsewhere.

But equally, an encounter with the risen Christ can quietly, and simply, make a difference in the places where we already are, make a difference in the ground beneath our feet, in the boat in which we sail.

My favourite film has long been the Pixar movie *Finding Nemo*. In fact it is probably the only film whose last lines I would be able to tell you – Nemo has been found (apologies for the spoiler), and his friends at the aquarium are free. There is much jubilation and cheering. And then one fish turns to another and delivers the film's closing words 'so what next'?

Now we have encountered the risen Christ, we may well ask 'what next?'. And it is just possible, that the 'what next' is that we turn back to our day jobs, get back in our fishing boats. Our offices. Our school runs. Our neighbourhoods. Our sports clubs. Our families. Back to the ground beneath our feet. But as we do so, we may glimpse, on the shore the figure of the one who knows and loves and designs the whole thing. Not an armchair expert, or a member of the Twitterati, but the one who knows us, and our work and our lives intimately enough to be worth listening to. And as we listen, maybe, just maybe, our ordinary will be transformed.

Amen