

## Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> May 2022

**Reading** John 21:1-19

### Reflection 1

Imagine the scene – the disciples have left the locked room of fear, having experienced the presence of the resurrected Jesus. However, the mood is still low, what are they going to do now, the crucifixion has taken away their confidence, they are uncertain and still a little fearful. Not many people believe in life after death so sharing their story could be a risk. Perhaps they should go back to the day job.

Seven of them have gathered on by the sea of Tiberius and they are sat pondering. Peter announces he is going fishing, it is what he was good at after all, and the others decide to join him. They go out onto the lake and spend the night casting nets, they catch nothing, and the mood deepens, everything is going wrong. As the light dawns they see a figure on the beach. He shouts to them, asking if they have caught anything, although he seems to know the answer already. Peter replies, telling him they have nothing, and the stranger tells him to try casting on the other side of the boat. Now, they must have tried this during the night you would think but they do as the stranger suggests and are amazed when their nets come up overflowing with fish.

The disciple who had been closest to Jesus, senses something and looks keenly at the figure on the beach, he says 'It is the Lord'. They all turn and look but Peter quickly grabs some clothes and leaps into the sea to swim ashore. The others are left to struggle with the catch and bring the boat to shore. There appears to be no comment on Peter's actions, either by Jesus or the other disciples. When they are all together, they notice a charcoal fire alight, fish cooking and bread at the side. Jesus invites them to bring some of the fish they have caught and Peter goes to the boat for the fish.

No one dares ask if it is Jesus, the sense it but visually are not sure, they simply with unspoken agreement, believe it is.

After the meal Jesus speaks to Peter, perhaps alone walking at the shore. He asks him three times if Peter loves him, and three times Peter replies yes. Each time Jesus asks Peter to do something – feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. Most people, read this as some comment on Peter's three denials. Tom Wright suggests the scene has been deliberately set to remind Peter of his actions, the mention of the charcoal fire being a link with the charcoal fire which was beside Peter when he made the denials, the small would have reminded him. He tells a story about a dinner party after which one of the guests offers to help tidy up. He is given a towel to dry things but in the process, completely by accident, a crystal vase is broken. The friend is mortified and cannot apologise enough. The event could have been enough to have altered the relationship forever, embarrassment, guilt, shame, you can imagine the situation.

The hosts were upset, the jug had been a recent gift and they could not help being initially angry. However, the more they reflected the more they realised they needed to do something, the friendship was more important than the jug. A little while later they organised another dinner party and invited their friend, imagine how he felt. At the end of the meal he probably wanted to escape quickly, but the hosts asked him to help with the clearing up, handing him a towel. There is a moment when the guest stares in disbelief, but the hosts smile, and the guest helps to clear up and all is well.

Jesus demonstrates Peter's forgiveness by giving him a job to do, feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. 3 denials, 3 questions, 3 jobs. Forgiveness comes in many forms, but it is rarely effective if just a passive acknowledgement. When we forgive, we need to find a way to rebuild trust, to rebuild the relationship. It is not enough to say, 'that's okay', forgiveness is about more than that, it needs to be about growth. Follow me takes on a whole new dimension.

**Reading** Acts 9:1-20

### **Reflection 2**

Saul has not responded well to the stories of Jesus, ever since Jesus' death he has been hounding the followers of the way, capturing them and taking them to Jerusalem for prosecution. This new faction with Judaism must be quashed. He is on the way to Damascus, presumably to capture more followers when he has an experience that will change his life forever. We read of a bright light and a voice, and although his companions hear the voice they see nothing. The experience leaves Saul blind and at the mercy of his travelling companions, who take him on to Damascus.

Once there Saul prays, now we must assume that praying was a part of Saul's life as a Jew but this time his prayer was different. He was perhaps more open, more in awe, perhaps for the first time he engaged with the stories he had heard of Jesus. He 'hears' a reply to his prayer.

At the same time, a follower of the way, Ananias, is also praying when he too hears a reply but not one that fills him with joy. He is to go to Straight Street where he will find Saul of Tarsus. The very name sends shivers down his back, Saul's reputation has spread. NO! He cannot go there, he knows what will probably happen, but God is insistent, there is a plan, all will be well. Ananias travels to the house and enters, finding Saul he is surprised to find that he is expected and as he lays hands on Saul something like scaled drops from Saul's eyes and he can see. It is a story of forgiveness and again involves a response, a job to do.

Saul remains in Damascus for several years, changes his name and, after learning all he can from the disciples, he begins to tell his story, first in the synagogue and then later on his travels. It is a story we read in the letters sent to early churches as Paul encourages early Christians to see the truth of Jesus' ministry. He also, fed lambs, tended sheep and fed sheep.

We are all forgiven, and forgiveness comes in many forms, but the gracious forgiveness of God is never passive, it is an active forgiveness that encourages a response, we hear the call, and we can choose to respond – tell your story, share your experience of God and make a difference in the world.

*One day a hen and a pig were walking along the road together, enjoying the sunny morning and having a friendly conversation. As they turned a corner, they noticed a big poster by the roadside. It was an advertisement for the 'Great British Breakfast', and it featured such goodies as fried potatoes, tomatoes, mushrooms, and first and foremost, two fried eggs, a couple of sausages and a few rashers of sizzling crisp bacon.*

*'Ah', sighed the hen, 'just look at that. What a picture! Doesn't it make you feel proud, to be chosen to participate in such a wonderful institution as the great British breakfast?'*

*'Hmm', replied the pig. 'It may be participation for you, but for me it is total commitment.'*

*Participation is free, commitment will cost you. (British Folk tale)*

### **Suggested Hymns**

He is Lord, he is Lord

Father we love you

Forgiveness is your gift

In my life Lord be glorified

Will you come and follow me