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John 21: 1- 17

We are continuing our look at post resurrection appearances with the story of Jesus appearing to some of the disciples at Galilee. The particular focus in this is on Peter.

I love this story. I think any text where Jesus is having a one on one with someone is particularly engaging. Its to do with the idea of God dealing with us as individuals. Caring that much. Jesus ministry was not about mass events. It was very often personal. And it still is.

The first thing we need to note is that the disciples are back in Galilee. There is quite a bit of banter in the commentaries about this as some see it as gross disobedience as they'd been told to go to the ends of the world to spread the good news and all they'd done was bunk off home. But others point out that in both Mark and Matt Jesus tells them to go to Galilee and that he'll meet them there. John doesn't record such an instruction which is why it's contentious here. What he does record is Jesus saying in chp 16:32 that they would all scatter and go `home' so John seems to think they are there because they needed to be on familiar soil.

And frankly –who can blame them.

Put yourselves in their shoes. Let me read you a quote from Merrill Tenney.

The last week in Jerusalem had been a trying and confusing period in the lives of these men. In the space of just a few days they had received more teaching from Jesus than their immature spiritual state could assimilate; they had seen their hopes of an outward kingdom shattered; one of their own number had betrayed Jesus to the chief priests, and all of them had forsaken him as he went to the cross. In 2 or 3 hours they had been reduced from the position of disciples of an honoured and popular teacher to that of hunted partisans of a discredited imposter. Then, in addition to all this, came the resurrection and the startling appearances.

We have the benefit of 2000 years of history. We know Jesus rose from the dead. We have had people we respect and trust telling us about it. We have the proof the world wide church [just think of all the people in 210 countries that will be praying on 31st may]. The church would not have survived persecution and the fact that it is grossly unfashionable if it were not based on the fact of the risen Lord. If Jesus were simply a nice prophet he would not have managed to sustain this massive movement that is the church. But the disciples didn't have that hindsight. They were in a state of confusion. So here they are in Galilee, needing familiarity and something to eat.

So Peter decides to go fishing. Peter is typically decisive. 'Let's do something'. It's not only typical but it is also important that it is his decision. More on that later.

They have no luck – just a long night. At last, in the morning, some stranger on the shore shouts instructions to them. Thankfully I don't have to know anything about fishing but I gather it's very odd that the fisherman listened to a man on the shore. Not normal practice. But it indicates [and I'm sorry about the pun] how rudderless they were.

Why can't they recognize him? Lots of talk about this too. To me it's clear that Jesus prevented them because he had something to teach them. Same as Cleopas and Mary on the road to Emmaus [Bishop C] they couldn't recognize him and they walked next to him for ages. Had they known they were listening to the risen Christ they might have been overwhelmed and not be as receptive to the teaching.

What did Jesus want to teach the disciples? 2 things -

- 1/ listen to me. Take heed. And trust.
- 2/ with me there is abundance, without me the net is empty.

The disciples listened and caught the fish. It was not the obvious thing to do – they'd been at it all night. Why would the other side help them? There was no logic – but they did as he said and had great success. The net was overflowing. 153 large fish instantly.

What does this say to us as we go about our lives, as we make decisions? It says that sometimes – not always but sometimes - God's direction for us may be against the run of play. May seem illogical. If not totally crazy at least odd. But we must listen anyway. Because doing the odd things with God is more fruitful than being logical without him.

I asked my connect group for stories..

My husband Graeme had felt led to some illogical calls on his work life. He was doing his articles in J'burg with a great firm and he had great prospects. He was loving it. Great social life, etc. He then goes back to a school reunion in KWT and thinks 'I am so glad I don't live here.' It's not exactly a happening place. Back in Jburg he suddenly realized that he should be doing human rights law – and guess where he knew he has to practice it. So he leaves J'burg, finishes his articles with a King firm, and then against all advice calls a friend and says 'lets start our own firm and get going with human rights law' which they did. Graeme's decision taught him so much about the people in the local community which he found very rewarding and has stood him in such good stead for his present BEE work.

Jeremy C told me about SU being called into black and coloured areas during apartheid – so they were poor communities. They were considered unsafe and it was certainly illegal. Plus there was no money for people to pay camp fees – which was helped keep the rest of SU afloat. Easy to justify not going doing this work. SU's decision cost them financially but the rewards were great as they reached so many people. Peter Broster was in fact talking at our connect group about what happened on those first mixed camps – how it woke the white kids up the effect of apartheid that they had never thought about before. That in itself was priceless education.

Phil Court gave me an example of God's direction which seemed illogical and unhelpful. He was in Jerusalem one Sunday with precious little time and much to see. But he felt that he should go to church first. The service went on for 3 hours. Afterwards he went off to see what he could fit in and found that he fitted in everything and more! He had a real sense of God saying to him you honoured me and I will honour you.

Clyde Broster told me about when he and Pam were needing a new home as their school house lease was expiring. And unlike any other Christian couple they couldn't agree. Finally they found one that was not ideal but ok – but the seller changed his mind! Feeling discouraged and didn't have too much time left, but Clyde decided that instead of frantically house hunting they would go off to a SU event at Rocklands. Not very logical but he felt it was right.

On their way home they took a different route, saw a private sale house, stopped, BOTH liked and agreed to make an offer. Not only did they both agree but the bank that was only making one loan a month at the time, agreed to theirs. They have been there 30 yrs.

This taking heed is [sadly] not about financial success. The full net does not represent money and status. None of the above examples brought financial security. That is why God's direction may seem illogical. Counter culture. It's not about what the world worries about or about an easy life – but it is about abundance of life.

In fact for Peter the rest of the chapter goes on to relate how Jesus tells Peter he will be led where he doesn't want to go and John is clear that Jesus is indicating that Peter will die as he fulfills his mission of establishing the church, so for Peter heeding Jesus and following his direction is certainly not about an easy life or even a long one. It's about the quality of that life. It's about fulfillment. Despite the hardship it's about joy and abundance.

Remember I said the fact it was Peter's decision to go fishing is important? It's because it indicates that he was going to go back to fishing for fish. Not too difficult for a fisherman you may think. But Jesus dramatically demonstrates that if he was going to live without Jesus it would be an empty life. He would not succeed.

Now we know that if we go it alone and in our strength we can achieve little that counts, but we constantly need reminding. This text is one of those reminders.

God has a perfect plan for each of us. It may seem a bit weird but heed his voice. It most probably won't make us rich – but it will make us fulfilled.

Let's move on -

With the miracle of the fish John recognizes that this is Jesus. Again both John and Peter revert to type. John twigg, Peter acts. He jumps in the water. At the tomb Peter goes in first, John understands first.

It is probable here that the similarities between this miracle and Luke 5 v4 helped John[when they first met Jesus and he told them where to put their nets and they had a huge catch]. This would have helped John put 2 and 2 together. That itself is not important but it is important that it was a fishing miracle – could have been a calming of the storm. But Jesus did this to remind them that he called them away from fish to men. He's reminding Peter I called you once and told you what I'd make of you - don't go back to your old ways.

After they have eaten Jesus turns to Peter and calls him 'Simon son of John'. He's not calling him Peter the rock on whom I'll build my church right now. This sets the scene for the next conversation. It tells us this is about Peter having denied Jesus and feeling he had failed him. Jesus knew how frail Peter felt and he wants to deal with it.

He asks him 3 times do you love me more than these?

Did he mean these men? Was he asking 'Do you have more love for me than they do?? You bragged you would stay the course before my trail even if they didn't but you couldn't – so do you really love more than they do?'

Certainly possible that he meant that but it seems an odd question to ask in front of the others.

Its more likely he was asking do you love me more than these fish and way of life. This safety and security.

Now does Jesus really need to be told that he is loved by a man that was so excited to see him he dived in the water?

No. who needs to know that Peter loves Jesus?

Peter does.

And Peter needs to know that Jesus knows.

So he asks him 3 times to counter the 3 times that Peter denied him before the cock crowed. Jesus didn't need the repetition, Peter did. It was all for Peter.

Peter needed to know that Jesus knew he loved him, and he needed to know that he was forgiven. He was forgiven on cross, Peter just needed to receive that forgiveness and now he would. Before this incident Peter felt unworthy, he's let Jesus down, he was no longer Peter the rock, he would probably go back to what he used to be good at – fishing. Jesus gives him the opportunity to affirm his commitment to him, in doing so he lets Peter know he is forgiven and by saying feed my lambs and tend my sheep, he reinstates him as Peter on whom I'll build my church.

It's a very powerful dialogue. Peter may have felt exasperated by the repetition, felt that Jesus doubted his answers, but the significance of it would quickly be clear to him, not least because Jesus goes on to tell him what lies ahead as he serves his Lord. Jesus was saying to Peter, you are my rock, you are loved and worthy. I have work for you.

You see despite our failings God can use. Maybe because of them because once we have recognised them we are humble and vulnerable and that is not a bad place to be with God. Knowing our need for his strength is very healthy.

What does this say to us?

It reminds us of all the times we have denied Jesus. In thought word and deed. We can probably all identify with Peter's feeling of unworthiness. His desire to crawl back to what is familiar –that with which you know you can trust yourself.

These denials may not be whoppers that would stand out to everyone but perhaps unethical choices we have made, the way we used money, our dependence on it. Sometimes these subtle denials are the hardest to deal with because they creep up on us –

perhaps we only know they exist because we find ourselves withdrawing from God, being uncomfortable in his presence. Have you felt that? And then you feel unfit for use by God.

What we need to take from this morning's text is that nothing is unforgiveable. We are indeed all ready forgiven. The work is done. Our only job is to receive that forgiveness. In our contrite state all we need do is accept what Jesus has done of us and know we are reinstated. God has kingdom work for us to do.

The real tragedy is not when we deny when we do the wrong things and its not even Jesus' agonizing death on the cross. The real tragedy is when we don't personally receive the gift of that sacrifice- the forgiveness that he won. He gives us the permission to put the sin behind us and the opportunity to start afresh and walk into what God has in store for us – abundant life. If we don't do that, then not only will we personally miss out but so will many others. Imagine if Peter had stayed with his unworthiness and his fish. How much smaller would the global day of prayer have been then?

So, let's sum up, what did Peter learn from this loving encounter with Jesus and therefore what does it teach us?

It shows us that God may lead us down strange routes sometimes, and as odd as it may seem to follow the lead, we need to heed his voice and trust him. The illogical course with God will be far more fruitful than the logical one without him.

The text also reminds us that we are forgiven, we just need to receive that forgiveness and to walk into the abundant life that he has planned for us. It won't necessarily be easy or comfortable but it will be rich all the same.

Jesus did not die on the cross for us to sit around thinking what dismal failures we are. He knows our potential and can work with our failures and he has work for us to do. In response, in gratitude for the cross we need to accept the forgiveness and walk into the life he won for us.