

Over the next few weeks we will continue to follow the events of the church calendar. We have had Easter, when we remember Jesus dying and rising again. Then there were a number of times Jesus appeared to the disciples and others, before he ascended to heaven.

And we are in that time now, after Jesus rose but before ascension Sunday.

So as I have been thinking about this time, I have started to wonder about why it is there. And I have realised that while I might want to rush off to the next thing, this time was actually really important.

I have observed Jo knitting a few jumpers over the years often knitting patterns with different coloured wools. Once the knitting is complete and I think that it is all done, she will say well I just need to finish off the loose ends. She will turn the garment over and then spend the next couple of evenings tidying those up before sewing the garment together and it being complete.

And this period is like that.

So as we enter this time, I will pray.

prayer...

Our reading this morning is from John chapter 21.

I will read verses 1 to 13

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon Peter said to them, "I am going fishing." They said to him, "We will go with you." They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." He said to them, "Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some." So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, "Who are you?" because they knew it was the Lord. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

The inspired word of God.

It had been a tough few weeks for Peter. Everything had seemed to be going so well. He had seemed to be learning so much. It had been three years of following Jesus, of being with Jesus night and day. And then after all that, Peter had denied Jesus. Not just once, but three times in one night.

Peter was supposed to be the rock. Jesus had said to him

And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it¹

Peter had done all the training. It was only weeks before Jesus was going to ascend to heaven.

And Peter was certainly not feeling like a rock.

Peter had showed that there were still issues in his life, there were still weaknesses and insecurities.

Denying Jesus when the pressure comes on does not sound like a rock, or anything you might want to use for building a foundation.

Denying Jesus when the pressure comes on sounds like a soil that is prone to liquefaction. A soil from the red zone.

But God had something more in store for Peter. Peter was going to be the rock on which the church was built. And so this passage gives a real insight into a pivotal time in Peters life.

¹ *The Holy Bible : New Revised Standard Version*. 1989 (Mt 16:18). Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Today's reading about Peter and the disciples fishing is a close parallel to something that happened right at the beginning when Jesus first called Simon Peter to be one of his disciples.

It is a story that is found at the start of Luke chapter 5. I will give you a brief outline. Jesus was talking by the edge of the sea of Galilee.

The crowd was so keen to hear him they pressed in on him. So he got into Simon Peter's fishing boat and he taught the crowd from there.

After he had finished, he told Simon Peter to put out into deep water and put out his fishing nets. Simon answered, "Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet if you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break. Simon Peter responded to that by falling on his knees and saying Go away from me, Lord, for I am a sinful man. Jesus then said to him, do not be afraid; from now on you will be a fisher of men. And Simon Peter followed Jesus from then onwards.

That was the start.

Do you see the parallels ? The reminder that was there for Simon Peter ?

Every fisherman remembers their big catches. They remember those stories. They will tell them time and time again even if they happened 30 years ago. And these two stories were both big catch stories.

Both times there were no fish until Jesus showed up and asked the fishermen to do something unexpected. Both times there were miracles. Both times it caused a reaction deep down in Simon Peter. The first time he almost rejected Jesus, he was afraid. The second time, despite him having denied Jesus just days before, he was so keen to meet Jesus again that he leapt into the water and swam ashore. And to me that shows that while there were still some underlying issues in Peter's life, there had been lots of good things that had happened as well. Peter had learnt, he had grown. He had experienced the love of God.

But Peter also knew that he had stuffed up and he wanted reconciliation. He wanted those underlying issues to be sorted out. After the experience of being with Jesus, things could not just go back to what they were like before. Peter knew that. But Peter was in a place for a learning moment.

And so after eating breakfast together on the beach, Jesus took Peter aside and said to him

“Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” Peter replied to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” A second time Jesus said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you

used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” After this he said to him, “Follow me.”

As I have been thinking about Peter and the place that he was in. I have decided that the words of Jesus to Peter, those words "do you love me?" were very significant. I think that they put the spotlight onto that area of Peter's life, his internal stuff that led to him to deny Jesus. It was to do with insecurities, love, fear and Peter understanding what he was really like.

The first two times Jesus questioned him, was one where Peter was asked - do you love me with that special unconditional sacrificial love of God. Peter, do you love me like that.

And Peter responded, Lord you know that we are very close special friends. I can't use that word for unconditional, sacrificial love. Since I have not shown that in my actions in denying you.

The third time, Jesus asked the question, "do you love me" Jesus used the same word that Peter used for love, the word for very close special friends. Peter was saddened by that, but he knew that Jesus knew everything, Jesus knew why Peter needed to respond like he did.

And in that response, Peter showed a new realisation of what he was like. Peter, the impulsive man, Peter the man full of self confidence, the one who would charge ahead of everyone else. Peter now was

looking at his own character and seeing that his self confidence had just been a screen, a facade.

Behind it, there were doubts, insecurities, fears. When Jesus had been arrested and people said to him look you were with Jesus. Peter denied Jesus, strongly and with intensity. Denied, maybe because of fear. Peter had been afraid. Fear and love are linked. Perfect love drives out fear.

Peter knew that Jesus loved him. He knew it, he experienced it. Jesus questions to him, surrounded that area of love and fear. And in these questions from Jesus and in his response Peter realised how much he loved Jesus and he also realised what his own limitations were. This wasn't brash Peter who could do anything bigger, better and faster than anyone else. This was self aware Peter who realised what he actually was like. Who responded to God based on that knowledge.

And so this was the start of something new. Something great. This meeting with Jesus was not just a reconciliation, where things were made right again. There was also a new start to something bigger and greater.

Peter had been a fisherman. He was called to be a fisher of men. Now Jesus was calling him to be a shepherd. Someone who would feed and tend God's lambs and sheep.

Being a shepherd was a new calling. A calling of responsibility. A calling to show care and compassion to others. Care and compassion just like he had experienced himself.

Impulsive Peter, full of self confidence Peter, charging on ahead of everyone else Peter could not be a shepherd. It needed Peter to realise who he was, it needed Peter to realise what he was like before he could become a shepherd. Before he could become the rock on which God would build his Church.

And this was a new beginning for Peter.

So what about us...

Each of us experiences times in our lives that we could call learning opportunities.

They are those moments of realisation, the times when we understand things in a whole new way. When we understand ourselves more clearly. Why we might have done the things that we have done.

Those are our learning opportunities.

It might be that we realise that we have relied on things other than God. When we use other things to try and support us, things like addictions and bad habits, well those are ways that we deny God, we deny the power of God in our lives.

It might be that there are times when fear rules our lives, when we react out of fear rather than love, just like Peter did.

It might be that we have issues from our past. I can remember clearly realising, firstly that I have issues, and then secondly that everyone has issues as well. Even our parents had issues that they were working through, sometime they go from generation to generation. There are learning opportunities for us, they can be times when we realise who we are, what we are really like.

God says to us. Ask me into those times, ask me into those areas of your life. God loves us, with the loving unconditional love of God. God asks us to listen to what he has to say to us. To read his word and to respond to what God says to us through the Holy Spirit.

God will put his finger on things in our lives.

And it is up to us to listen and to respond

We too can change, just like Peter did.

We too can have a new lease of life, just like Peter did.

We too can experience what God has in store for us as we follow Jesus.

Let us pray.

Prayer...