

I love preaching in the Easter season. It's by far the best time of year for preachers. The Easter story is a great text to be considering. Each gospel has their own resurrection stories. They're all slightly different. They're all slightly quirky stories, which is why I love getting into them and speaking about them. Take this story in that John 21, which like so many of the other resurrection stories seems to raise as many questions as it answers. This particular passage raises three questions in my mind that I want to consider this morning.

The first is this, why is the story included at all? I ask that because if you look at the end of John chapter 20, just before where our passage begins, the paragraph feels as if it's rounding off a book. It says that this book is written that you might believe. And it kind of feels like a coda, an ending to a book as if it originally ended there. And then the chapter 21 that we are reading from today might appear as something of an afterthought because it picks up the story, picks up again and it gets going. It feels this chapter slightly different in style and vocabulary to what's gone before.

So why was it added? Well, no one really knows for sure, but let me hazard a guess. I think the writer wanted to add even more weight to the reality of the resurrection. He wanted to beef his story up a bit. He wanted everyone to know the reality of this wonderful truth that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead. There must always have been people around who doubted the veracity of the resurrection. There were those who said the disciples hadn't really met the risen Lord Jesus. They'd simply had a vision. Behind their backs they might say they'd had an hallucination. But either way, they weren't convinced. The writer of John's gospel is writing to persuade them, to convince them of the reality of what happened that first Easter morning.

This passage is further evidence that the risen Jesus wasn't a vision or a hallucination, but a real embodied person. And I think it's a compelling story because it feels so authentic. It doesn't feel like a made-up story. And I say that mainly because of what Jesus says here. If you were making up a story of somebody coming back to life, you wouldn't have a punchline that was "come and have breakfast". That's

a rather downbeat punchline. It's all a bit homey. What this story shows is that Jesus in his resurrected form was not some aloof ethereal body floating around, but someone who could make a fire, someone who could cook breakfast for his disciples. They'd been out fishing all night. They were hungry. Jesus addresses their physical needs, which says something very important about our resurrection faith.

Our resurrection faith is not about escaping from this world. It's about working to engage with and transform this world into the kingdom of God. Our faith may be spiritual, but that doesn't mean that it's not worked out in the day-to-day reality of everyday life. Those practical physical aspects of life are deeply touched by the truth and reality of the resurrection. Our resurrection faith is not an escapist faith. We're not celebrating this season "a pie in the sky when you die". The resurrection faith leads us deeper into this world. The resurrection is all about transformation. Jesus was transformed. His resurrection body was transformed into something new. Some element of this physical world was taken up and made new.

My second question about the passage is this, why is it so specific about the number of fish that the disciples caught? Those of you like me who had a number of turbulent teenage romances that always ended badly would've been told like I was told that there are plenty of fish in the sea. Well, in the ancient world, the zoologists could actually name exactly how many fish there were in the sea. They'd calculated there were 153 different types of fish. And nobody's really sure, but I think that the number here has a symbolic value that stands for inclusivity. Just as the disciples caught in their nets the number of fish that there were in the sea or thought to be in the sea, so when they went out to be fishers of men and women, they were to catch all different types of people. No one was to be left out or excluded. Everybody was to be brought into the nets of faith.

And just as then fishing nets could hold all the different types of fish without breaking, so the church should be able to hold all the different types of people in the world. There should be no limits to its inclusivity. The church is to include everyone. And there's a great illustration of the variety of people

included in the nets of the church in this story. There's Peter, the wildly enthusiastic disciple, who for some reason put his clothes on and jumps out of the boat, perhaps one of the very few people to ever do that. Most people do it the other way around. They undress and then get in the sea, but he puts his clothes on, jumps in the sea, and there's no evidence that he gets there any quicker. But anyway, that's indicative of his impulsive nature.

Then there's John who provides a strong contrast, the beloved disciple. He's the quiet reflective one. He's the one who stays in the boat to make sure that it gets to shore. He was the first to recognize that it was Jesus on the shore. He has a more measured approach than Peter. John and Peter, two very, very different types of people, both responded to Jesus in very different ways, but both are very important disciples. What they had in common was that they both made a response to the risen Jesus in their own way.

The final question I have about this passage is why it's referred to so often as a subtitle in my Bible as "the miraculous catch of fish". Jesus says, "Have you caught anything?" "No," said the disciples. "Then throw your nets out onto the right side," Jesus says, "And you'll find something." And they did. Well, there's no suggestion of anything particularly miraculous coming here. The fish don't leap out of the water into the boat. That's how they fished. They would fish close to shore with a friend on the shore looking at where the water was ruffled and telling them where to put their nets. That's how the fishermen worked on the Sea of Galilee.

I think it's interesting here not so much the miracle or the miraculous aspect. What's more significant to me is this image of how Jesus related post-resurrection to his disciples. He comes alongside the disciples whilst they're engaged in their daily activity of fishing. There's nothing particularly dramatic in this encounter. What's most impressive is the gentle voice of the master guiding the disciples. It has echoes of Rebecca's sermon last week of Jesus meeting those two disciples on the road to Emmaus. He quietly came alongside them and walked with them. There's that great line, "Jesus himself drew near". That's what's happening here in this story. And

this is something that resonates with my own experience of the resurrected Jesus.

I've had no particularly dramatic or miraculous encounter with the risen Lord, no blinding vision, but I am familiar with that quiet prompting voice calling me to action. The disciples could have been so taken up with their fishing that they might have missed the voice of Jesus calling to them from the bank. They weren't expecting him, but they heard him. They heard his voice, which is the challenge for us. Are we so busy with our daily activities that we miss the voice of the risen Lord addressing us, calling us?

Do we work at being still, taking the time to listen for Jesus, paying attention to him? The risen Jesus by his spirit still draws alongside his disciples. We must be ready to hear him. So often that voice gets lost in all the busyness. We should listen, pay attention, and be prepared to respond. We might be a Peter kind of person, or we might be more restrained like John, but the key is that we listen, we hear, and we respond. We respond to the risen Lord, Jesus, who still calls his people.

Hallelujah. Christ is risen!

The Lord is risen indeed. Hallelujah!