

This is the last time this year that I get to preach on the resurrection stories, and that makes me a bit sad because this is my favorite time of year to preach. I love all of the resurrection stories that we get in this Easter season. Although I have to admit that I've already gone into overtime a bit because the last two weeks I've changed the readings to make sure that I get to preach on a resurrection story. So, I hope you'll forgive me that, but indulge me as I carry on with these resurrection stories, I like them all. I like the fact they're all different, each gospel writer has their own resurrection stories, but they've all got something in common. There's a quirkiness about all the stories, they all seem to raise more questions than they answer.

And that's certainly true of today's gospel story from St. John, and the first question that it raises is why it's there at all. Because if you look at the verses that precede it, from John Chapter 20, it would seem that that was the original ending place for the gospel, which the verse before it goes like this, "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book." And then our gospel reading for today starts off by saying, after these things, it's almost like an afterthought, and it might very well have been written as a PS, because the start and the vocabulary is a bit different to what's gone before. So why was it added? Well, nobody really knows, but I'll hazard a guess. I think the writer included this story because they wanted to add more weight to the reality of the resurrection.

There must always have been people around, going right back to that first Easter, who needed to be convinced that Jesus really was raised from the dead. Many people, even at the time, must have said that the disciples were having a vision, or to be less polite, behind their backs they probably said they were hallucinating. And this writer includes this story to emphasize the point that the disciples were not having a hallucination. This was no mere wishful thinking on the disciples' part. Jesus, after his resurrection, was no mere apparition. This was a real embodied person that they encountered after the resurrection. And this story, like the other

resurrection stories, to me feels compelling. And one of the reasons it sounds and feels compelling to me is that it sounds authentic. It doesn't read like a legend or a made-up story, and I say that mainly because of what Jesus says in the story.

If you were making up a story of somebody coming back to life, of being resurrected, then the punchline to that story wouldn't be, "Come and have breakfast." That's a rather downbeat, homey kind of thing for someone to say in a resurrected state, it's hardly a big climax to the story. What it does show is that the resurrected Jesus was not some aloof, transparent figure floating around in a rather ethereal way, but someone who could make a fire, who could cook breakfast. The disciples have been out fishing all night and they were hungry, and Jesus addresses their physical need, which says something very important. Our resurrection faith is not about escaping from this world, it's about working to engage with this world, and transform this world, and join in with God's transformation of this world, into the kingdom of God,

Faith may be spiritual, but that doesn't mean that faith is not worked out in the practical day-to-day physical things in life in which we're all involved. Our resurrection faith is not an escapist faith. It's not pie in the sky when you die. It leads us deeper into this world. The resurrection is all about transformation, taking up this world and making it into something new.

The second question that this passage raises is why it's so specific about the number of fish that the disciples caught. Verse 11 says this, "So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, 153 of them." Those of you, who like me, had a number of turbulent teenage romances would not doubt have been told several times, as I was, that there are plenty of fish in the sea. The ancient zoologists at the time of Jesus thought they knew a number for how many fish there were in the sea, and their number was 153. That was a common understanding of the varieties of fish that were in the sea.

So I think the number here is being used symbolically, it stands for inclusivity. Just as the disciples caught in their nets the same number of fish that there are in the sea, so when they went out to be fishers of women and men, they were to catch all different types of people. There was nobody beyond the reach of Jesus who was not to be brought in to the new kingdom that he was establishing. Just as their nets could hold all the fish without tearing, so the church should be able to hold all the different types of people, everyone was to be included.

And there's a great illustration of this in the story. There's Peter, the wildly enthusiastic disciple, who for some reason we're told, jumps out of the boat when he sees Jesus. Then there's John, the beloved disciple, the quiet, reflective one, so different to Peter. He's the one who brings the boat ashore. It was his more measured approach that actually got the boats to shore and make sure they were all okay. John and Peter, two very different types of people, very different types of disciples, but both very significant disciples. What they had in common was that they both made a response to Jesus in their own way. Following Jesus, for both of them, look different, but they both played a key role in the church.

The final question I have about this passage is why it's referred to in the subtitle of my Bible, and why the story is often called "the miraculous catch of fish". It says in verse five that Jesus says to the disciples, "Have you caught anything?" "No," they say, and then Jesus says, "Well, throw your net out onto the right-hand side of the boat and you'll find some fish." And they did. Now, there's no real suggestion of anything miraculous here going on, because that was how the fishermen worked in that time, in the sea of Galilee. They'd have one of their mates on the seashore who would tell them where they could see the water ruffled and where they should put their net. So the boats aren't that far out, they could hear what was being said to them from the bank.

And I think what's interesting here isn't so much any miraculous element, but rather that this is a great picture of how the risen Jesus comes alongside his disciples. There's nothing dramatic in this encounter, they would have expected to see somebody on the beach guiding them. The most impressive feature to me is that the disciples recognize the gentle voice of their master calling to them. It's a bit like the story we were thinking of last week on the road to Emmaus where we're told that Jesus himself drew near and walked with the disciples. That's happening again here, the disciples are out fishing, and Jesus draws near to them and joins in with their fishing expedition.

And I find this resonating with my own experience of encountering the risen Lord Jesus. I've not had any particularly dramatic or miraculous visions, but I recognize that familiar, quiet, gently prompting voice of the risen Jesus speaking. The disciples could have been so taken up with their fishing, that they might've failed to hear Jesus calling to them, but they weren't. They heard his voice as he drew alongside them. And that's the challenge for us. Are we so busy that we don't hear the voice of Jesus calling to us? Or do we take the time to be still, and to listen to that voice? Or as we are learning in the adult education, to be mindful, as we practice mindfulness, which to me just is paying attention. We're called to pay attention to the work of God in our lives so that we might hear his voice.

The risen Lord Jesus still draws alongside his disciples, by his spirit, and calls them. We must be ready to hear that voice, which so often gets lost in the busy-ness, and we should be prepared to respond. We might respond in a St. Peter kind of way, or we might be more restrained and respond in a St. John kind of way. It doesn't matter. What's important is that we listen, and that we hear, and we respond to the risen Jesus, who's still comes alongside and calls to his people.

Hallelujah, Christ is risen. The Lord is risen indeed.
Hallelujah.