

## CONFERENCE CALL SERVICE 18.04.21

### MESSAGE

The writers of the four gospels were all wonderfully skilled tellers of stories. They knew the power of storytelling and the energy one story can gain if the listeners are able to make connections with other stories.

Remember how Luke tells the story of Jesus calling the first disciples. We're by the sea of Galilee. It's daylight and a group of fishermen are cleaning and mending their nets after an unsuccessful night's fishing. Jesus is also on the shore surrounded by a crowd of people. He makes a move towards the fishermen, climbs into one of their boats, asks them to float it a little further out on the water, sits down and continues to talk to the crowd.

As he finishes talking, he makes a suggestion which as experienced fishermen they could hardly take seriously:

*Come on! Let's go catch some fish.*

Simon Peter, in a way with which we become more and more familiar as the whole gospel story unfolds, reacts in knee-jerk fashion.

*Come off it, we know what we're doing you know, we've been at this game most of our lives, and despite all of our skill and hard work, we caught nothing last night; We're hardly likely to catch anything worthwhile this morning!!*

We don't know what Jesus did or said that led Peter to go against his better judgement and set sail.

But we do know what happened when he let down his nets. Filled with so many fish, they were in danger of breaking and the other boat and its fishermen was called out to help land the catch. And after that, for 3 short years, they followed, learning by example how to become fishers of men.

And so, to this morning's story.

We're back on the shore of the sea of Galilee.

Once more it's early morning. Once more we're amongst fishermen.

Despite the many warnings over the past three years, they still can't make sense of what has been happening to them.

They're disheartened, confused. All at sea – metaphorically and really.

Back to the sea, back to something familiar, safer, away from the unknown and the fear that it grew.

But again they'd had an unsuccessful night. Whatever they'd been hoping for hadn't happened. They're exhausted.

And then they notice somebody on the shore, calling to them.

Somebody suggesting they should lower their nets.

And their nets were filled – again.

Jesus is recognized. And the first to react to the news? No surprise here – Peter.

And this breakfast on the beach becomes a turning point for Peter.

And it's a turning point for all of us.

In some sense it's a re-turning, to the relationship that God always intended us to have with him.

A new beginning, a new way forward.

As this new journey is about to begin, our writer makes another interesting choice, one surely chosen to add greater resonance to the story.

In describing the breakfast that Jesus is cooking for Peter and the other disciples he uses the word *opsarion* for fish. He uses this word in only one other story about Jesus, when a small boy offers two small fish – *opsarion* – and 5000 are fed.

In the breaking of the bread – as in Luke's story of the meal at Emmaus – Jesus is fully recognized. In the breaking and serving of the bread are echoes of the Last Supper.

And surely as Jesus prepares and serves them this breakfast, the disciples and we are reminded of him who takes off his outer clothing, kneels and washes feet.

This was some meal. Prepared by the risen Servant King. Prepared for his bewildered, frightened disciples, Who are fed in both body and spirit.  
A meal that must surely have reminded them of the journey they had made with him.  
But one which also pointed firmly to the future.

Can you imagine how Peter must have been feeling that morning?  
How must he have felt every morning since that terrible evening when Jesus was arrested?  
It's a time of day when we can be at our lowest ebb, when doubts and fears can be at their greatest, when we want to hide from the world, when the prospect of getting up and facing the day ahead fills us with despair.  
I'm sure we've all been in a similar place.  
Maybe fishing was Peter's attempt to find a way out.  
A way not to wake up early and alone, a way to keep his mind occupied.  
And then an excuse to sleep the day away.  
But whatever we do, the emptiness inside doesn't disappear.

The events in the high priest's courtyard can never have been far from Peter's mind.  
Where had all his strength, courage and confidence gone?  
He couldn't forgive himself. He had been brought to a time of trial and had failed.

Perhaps if Peter had recalled one of Jesus' most powerful stories, those dark mornings would have been different,  
Remember the father, deserted and shamed by his son. The father waiting for the son's return. The father running, arms outstretched, welcoming him home before the son could utter a word.  
His son, forgiven, unconditionally!  
It is a forgiveness that is almost beyond our comprehension, beyond our capability.  
Peter is already forgiven. Unconditionally.  
There is no condemnation! Jesus asks questions about the here and now.  
Peter, do you love me? Yes! *Feed my sheep.*  
Peter, do you truly love me? Yes! *Take care of my sheep.*  
Peter, do you love me? Lord you know all things, you know I that love you! *Feed my sheep.*  
No demand for confession, no pressure for a public apology.  
Forgiveness is Peter's already.  
Forgiveness **and** something to do! Feed my sheep. Take care of my sheep. Feed my sheep.  
A commission, born of love and enabled through the Grace of God.  
In the prayer that Jesus taught us, we ask:

*Forgive us our sins  
as we forgive those who sin against us.  
Save us from the time of trial  
and deliver us from evil.*

True repentance is not without meaning.  
But God is able to forgive unconditionally. God forgives and encourages us to turn to Him.  
It is forgiveness such as this that truly heals, that truly reflects the love of God.  
In the bread and the fish of this breakfast on the beach we can catch the flavour of God's unconditional forgiveness.

In our second reading we heard the story of the turning point that changed Saul's name to Paul and redirected his life forever  
Again, despite his persecution and murderous threats against those who followed Jesus there is no direct condemnation. Again there are questions, Why? Why?  
Paul may experience suffering but he will suffer for his new-found belief, his commitment to his risen Lord.  
Again forgiveness – unconditional forgiveness present  
May we seek and be given the strength that both Peter and Paul found and play our part in helping feed and care for all of God's children.  
'Feed my sheep', says Jesus to each and everyone of us. **Amen**