New Kilpatrick

Podcast

9th May 2021

John 21:1-14

Introduction

The dawn was empty

The light weak and forgotten

As if words from a story were missing

The fishers waited on the water

The yellow surface

Shifting from dark to dawn

And whatever ripples there were

Lingered without purpose

The net floated

Like a sentence without a word

Just like their minds

Playing with the rumours of past days

When from the centre of their pondering

Deep in that watery abyss

A silver ebullition (eb-uh-lish-uhn)

A seething ball of fish, darted into their net

Now extremely alive

Like a thousand words, caught

and falling into single sentence

One they had already written in their minds:

Alleluia: he is risen!

Hello, I’m Roddy Hamilton… imagine you have a paper cut-out fish in your hand… you may wish to draw one or make one right now… Hold onto it in your mind or your hand… it has a story to tell…

Prayer 1

In such familiar places as this,

May we touch mystery,

May we speak your name,

But with awe and wonder;

May we relish

What we are not meant to understand;

Approach you,

With questions and adventures.

Loving God,

Beyond the words we use,

Yet contained in all of them;

Word of God,

Unlimited by any word,

Or book, or library;

Spirit of God,

Alive in imagination,

and art and story,

Here we find ourselves

In one more story

Of resurrection confusion,

And resurrection love,

In the familiar things,

Of breakfasts and nets,

Of fish and conversation.

May we have eyes and hearts and questions enough

To see through the pictures,

To the wonder breaking there,

The truth unfolding there,

The promise stretching there,

The relationships growing there.

Loving God,

Beyond the normal,

Familiar, and everyday,

Yet found in them all,

In that crossing point,

That between place,

May we meet you,

And touch.

Hear us

As we continue in the family prayer

Our father who is in heaven

Hallowed be your name

Your kingdom come

Your will be done on earth

As it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread

And forgive us our debt

As we forgive our debtors

Lead us not into temptation

But deliver us from evil

For yours is the kingdom

The power and the glory forever

Amen

Reading

We tangle the story from the bible with a partial retelling today. We hear the passage in the Message version of the Bible, but splice it with some reimagining of the parts of the story that miss telling us what the disciples maybe, perhaps might have been feeling. It is just one way of hearing these familiar words, as if for the first time, again. Jenn reads from scripture, and Pamela, the reimagined version.

1-3 After this, Jesus appeared again to the disciples, this time at the Sea of Galilee. This is how he did it: Simon Peter, Thomas (nicknamed “Twin”), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the brothers Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. Simon Peter announced, “I’m going fishing.”

After all those days of rollercoaster emotion, Peter had had enough. Being locked in the upper room had taken its toll on all of them: fear that Jesus was dead, and what would happen to them now, fear that he might be alive, and what that could actually mean for how they understood everything.

It wasn’t just for fresh air Peter had abandoned the upper room, but he needed a sense of reality. Resurrection wasn’t offering the solid ground it was supposed to, so he decided he’d go fishing. It was what he knew. It was familiar. It was a former life, but maybe that was what he needed just now, after all, Jesus was back, but what had actually changed?

3-4 The rest of them replied, “We’re going with you.” They went out and got in the boat. They caught nothing that night. When the sun came up, Jesus was standing on the beach, but they didn’t recognize him.

5 Jesus spoke to them: “Good morning! Did you catch anything for breakfast?”

Who was that? They could’t make out his features and his voice was caught in the morning breeze. It looked as if there was a fire already burning and waiting for food.

They answered, “No.”

6 He said, “Throw the net off the right side of the boat and see what happens.”

The disciples looked at each other. Had they forgotten so much about their past lives that they had forgotten how to fish? They knew one side or the other wouldn’t make any difference. They had been there all night and there wasn’t a single fish. And they were tired. Hauling nets wasn’t easy work and they had been doing it all night. But, they gave it a try, and hardly had the nets touched the water, when the largest shoal of fish tangled with their nets.

The dawn light danced off their scales like liquid silver. The sea was alive, and Peter and the disciples stretched, and heaved, and shouted, and strained. Had every fish in the sea decided to visit them?

After fifteen furious minutes, they sat in their boats, exhausted, catching their breath, dumfounded by their luck and what had just happened.

7-9 Then the disciple Jesus loved said to Peter, “It’s the Master!”

When Simon Peter realized that it was the Master, he threw on some clothes, for he was stripped for work, and dived into the sea. The other disciples came in by boat for they weren’t far from land, a hundred yards or so, pulling along the net full of fish. When they got out of the boat, they saw a fire laid, with fish and bread cooking on it.

10-11 Jesus said, “Bring some of the fish you’ve just caught.” Simon Peter joined them and pulled the net to shore—153 big fish! And even with all those fish, the net didn’t rip.

He acted as if this was just an ordinary day: a beach fire, a catch of fish, and a Messiah with bread. Of course there was bread: he was there, and they broke it, shared the fish, and retold stories that took them back to beginnings, and found once more, in the abundance, in the hospitality, in the stories they shared, Jesus among them, alive and full of life.

Reflection

I like a good beach… Not often had a barbecue on one… but I like the sense that these waves have been rolling in from time immemorial… and all my problems are so small in comparison to the eternal roll of the tide…

The disciples, however, weren’t having quite such a deeply spiritual moment… not at first anyway… They HAD managed to find their way out the Upper Room in which they had locked themselves… They were entering the world again… but despite everything that had happened… Peter found himself back at his old ways… Afraid of the future, uncertain what to do or even who he was… Peter’s reaction was to return to his old habits, patterns, addictions… a move back to what was familiar…

But, agh… it wasn’t working any more… Fishing was in their blood… it was their DNA… it was muscle memory… yet despite their expertise, they caught nothing… Not only did the old patterns no longer work, but the old patterns brought scarcity… there were no fish… the net was empty…

We have to understand here… that the net is a symbol… and always has been, of the church… The fishermen… the disciples… who were charged with catching people now… did what they did in the way they have always done… and caught nothing… that’s difficult…

But then, the voice from the shore - throw your nets out the other side… do your fishing differently… break your old habits… try doing it the other way… and low and behold, not just a catch, but a miraculous one… 153 fish… Doesn’t sound much but some say there was believed to be 153 species of fish in the sea… others that there were believed to be 153 nations… either way… the net… was filled… and unbroken… the church… or the kingdom of God… (I know these aren’t exactly the same)… big enough to be filled with the whole world and not break… and we’ve back to fishing for people again…

The lesson is last weeks… old habits don’t work in a new world… and to be honest… I’ve been surprise over the last year how often that theme is found in the stories we have been given to tell…

But this resurrection story goes further… As with all resurrection stories… it takes a while to recognise Jesus… Emmaus… the two upper room stories… at the tomb itself… no one recognises Jesus straight away… but when we break out of the old expectations… when we trust what seems impossible… then we are ready to recognise Jesus…

And that is usually when they share community… their eyes are opened to what is possible… In this story… it is when they come alongside the beachside fire… where there are already some fish cooking and some bread warming… and they add… from their own catch… and a community of abundance is created… in the midst of what was scarcity… then the rest of the disciples recognise Jesus…

It seems… once more… folk don’t recognise Jesus when they ‘understand’ God, or are able to sign up to a creed or a belief… None of that enters the resurrection equation… These old standards of measurement no longer work… What is clear from all the resurrection stories is that people recognise the risen Christ in hospitality… in creating community… in sharing abundantly and generously… Resurrection is not a matter of shared belief… it is found in shared love…

So we are called, perhaps, to reimagine church… not in the old ways of our traditional institutional habits… but begin through hospitality, generosity, sharing abundantly in the scarcity… a church that chooses to begin again, from these resurrection stories into a kingdom we are only beginning to glimpse anew…

Epilogue

153

The number of known species of fish at the time

The net: the church, the community of love

Big enough

generous enough

To hold the world

A church

That expands

Stretches

Reaches out

And makes space

For all

A place to find Jesus Christ

In abundant community

and generous hospitality

A re-imagined church

Built on resurrection stories

Prayer 2

Loving God,

Whose abundance

Is found in our scarcity,

May we live like that

In this community,

Parish,

Neighbourhood,

World.

May we speak of generosity

When the world speaks of limits,

From vaccinations to overseas development,

From welfare to public health,

Speak of the values to shape our future,

And redeem the lives of all.

May we live in such a way

In a country following elections,

Policies based on kindness and love,

Which feels so old fashioned,

Yet offer such a different outlook and future.

And when we have to let go

Those familiar things,

Ready to let our net out the other side,

May we enable that to happen

In new ways:

A new way of doing our world,

A new way of doing trade,

A new way of taxing multinationals,

A new way of responsibility for the least.

And loving God,

When we get to that beachside fire,

May we find ways to create community,

Recreate relationships,

Build up our neighbourhood

Through resurrection hope,

Creating abundance

Where there is scarcity,

Love where there is prejudice,

Peace where there is conflict,

Opportunity where there is limitation,

Hope where there is despair,

Laughter where there is dullness,

Grace where there is fear.

And so we pray,

Creating space now to name those closest to us,

Whose concerns are on our hearts,

Whose pain or grief is too much,

Whose physical or mental health, concerns,

Whose futures, education, jobs are fragile,

Hear us

So be it

Amen

Benediction