

New Kilpatrick

Sermon

5th May 2019

John 21:15-19

Spirit... redeem us... coax us towards life... shift us towards believing... that we are enough... we are your people... risen into new life... just as we are... and that is enough... So be it... Amen

When writing a sermon... theoretically... you are meant to move people... from where they are... into the story... Start with something in the news... or something happening locally... and link with the passage...

And that is attempted most Sundays... and I am going to attempt it again today... but it won't sound like that... It is simply a statement... aren't you glad we've got Peter the fisherman... that we have someone who has a side line in denying what's important to him... as one of the main characters in our faith story...

Isn't it good... he's standing there... born leader of the church... on that early morning beach... facing Jesus... who knows what's he's done... and Peter is wondering... did he hear me deny him... what's he going to say?...

But between that thought of Peter's... and Jesus' intake of breath before he replies... lets pause a minute... and link with something happening locally...

I've got a presbytery meeting this week... Presbytery is a gathering ministers and some elders... the leaders in a congregation... from a particular area... Our area is from Milngavie through Clydebank, Vale of Leven, Kilcreggan and Helensburgh... to administrate and make local decisions about the church... plan future ministerial deployment... finances... mission... etc...

The Presbytery has been reviewed in its ability to do that... and the report came out last week... and among other things... was a section entitled... The Challenge of Disengagement... not the disengagement of modern society with the church... as you may have thought... but simply disengagement of ministers with presbytery... ie attendance isn't very good... and the proposal is that those who don't attend a minimum number of meetings... will be reported to the Ministries Committee...

And it kind of exasperating that the disengagement with presbytery is to be sorted by disciplining those who don't come often enough... and I'm thinking... that's just the church down to a tee... let's discipline those who don't come... rather than ask why they don't come... Or refuse to consider changing... rather than recognise no one engages... because presbytery itself lacks some relevance in what the church is becoming...

How often we make that mistake... blame someone else... for our own state of being... and argument you hear not just in the church but in bowling clubs... or golf courses... even the turn out at elections...

Which is why I'm delighted to know Peter... because that moment between Peter and Jesus... "Do you love me... Yes... Feed my sheep"... is the exact antithesis of what the church has become... for this is a story where everything centres round unconditional love... and there is no caveat to that... that depends on how many meetings you attend... or that you are seen to live in a certain way... Peter hears no judgement... or conditionality... only... unconditional renewal...

Which is quite different to the world and the church... whose histories are littered with folk... whose lives have been broken and hurt by institutions who judge them... extract consequences... limit their freedom with conditions... and offer punishment...

A church and a world... who have laid lines everywhere... and who say when you cross them... there is no way back... a line of shame... a line of sin... a line of dishonour... scandal... does not know this story very well... Yet even the book of Hebrews in the Bible says... "It is impossible to restore again to repentance... those who have shared in the Holy Spirit... and then have fallen away"...

But here... on the beach... between Peter and Jesus... that is crushed under unconditional grace... Peter has always had more enthusiasm than anyone else among the disciples... but that lies in ruins... because of that one night... round the campfire... outside the high priests house... the night before Jesus is crucified...

Peter was the only disciple who had bothered to follow Jesus... to find out what was going on... to be in some way... with Jesus... as he was being tried... But a servant girl thinks

she recognises him... and shouts... "You're one of his followers, aren't you?"... and Peter denies it... Three times... before the rooster crows...

But Jesus simply asks him in this fresh new dawn... "Do you love me?"... and Peter replies... "Yes!"... "Feed my sheep" responds Jesus...

And again Jesus asks... "Do you love me"..."Yes Lord, I do love you"replies Peter... "Feed my sheep"...

"Peter"... asks Jesus for the third time... "Do you love me?"... "You know I love you"... "Feed my sheep"...

God proposed to love Peter again... There's the gospel... all of it... resurrection and all... no consequences... no punishment... no conditionality... to caveats...

The initiative of Easter is to affirm... new life comes... without strings... without consequences... without punishment or judgement for the past... Peter can't forget what he did... but Jesus recycles Peter's denial... into an affirmation and a call...

Go and be more now... Go and do more now... Go and respond to my call... It's now... I'm interested in... not what was before... Resurrection is absolute unconditional grace... that renews... brings new life... and sets us free from that which bound us in the past...

And any church... or institution... that does not recognise that... has forgotten about this story... They do not realise... they themselves... are Peter... and have at some point... stood on that beach with their past between them and Jesus...

This story stands against all the prevailing values we have in our communities... and faith... where judgement is made on others... where we measure people against a set of rules... where we speak of right belief before gracious belonging... where we unfriend people... unwelcome them from our communities by making it difficult to belong... judging them against our fears...

Sometimes you feel grace irritates the church... or our society... that people can simply be accepted... Resurrection breaks all those rules that were once used to limit folk by sin... reduce folk by prejudice... bind folk by fear... shrink folk by judgement...

It is as if Jesus is saying... the world may say you are unworthy... the church may say you are a sinner... but you won't hear that from me... I want you to live... to share in resurrection... Which is why this story of Peter is so vital... because Peter is given new life... and it is a parable for us all...

And can you see how this moves us... It moves us into Christian Aid week which is coming up... where what we do is unconditional... We raise a lot of money... and awareness... because we have decided to love folk first... We don't sit down and decided... what we will or will not support... We choose to support justice... new possibility... new chances for life for folk... because we believe in resurrection... and because we believe in resurrection... we don't judge who is going to get life... We give unconditionally to all who share our humanity...

And it also moves us into our festival beginning on Friday... where we make belonging to our wider community unconditional... choose first to love folk unconditionally... share the renewal of life... because we believe in resurrection... and because we believe in resurrection... we don't believe in sharing that life only with those we know... we share unconditionally with everyone...

So thank you... thank you for each being Peter... for being the evidence of God's proposal to love us all again... unconditionally forgiven and renewed...

But now the call... now the sharing of that unconditional acceptance... that renewal... that resurrected life... in Christian Aid... in Festival... in our parish... across our living...

This is the Gospel... let us live it...