

Sermon
10 April 2016
West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood

By: Rev Dr Jonanda Groenewald

Text: John 21:1-14

We had a fabulous holiday in Portugal! The weather was amazing – it only rained *one* day. (Not that I am trying to make you jealous!!) Now, I know you would probably think that I would tell you about all the things we did on the lovely sunny days, but actually, I want to tell you about what we did on the rainy day!

We sat in a lovely restaurant on the beach, looking out at the waves crashing against the rocks, mesmerised by how amazing nature is, when – of course – the boys got bored!!

Just before we'd gone to the beach, we were at the shops, and Nehan bought a Portugal rugby ball with his holiday pennies. So they decided to go play rugby on the beach. In the rain. That made me laugh, it was like "spot the two laddies from Scotland", because *nobody* else was outside!

So André and I had peace to drink our coffees, at least for about 5 minutes, untill Henro kicked Nehan's ball, Nehan's *brand new ball*, onto the roof of the restaurant.

Nehan started sobbing as if it was the end of the world. André went out to have a look, but there was no getting that ball back. Henro promised to buy Nehan a new ball, but there was no consoling him.

Eventually André had to make his voice thick and tell Nehan to just accept it – accidents happen, there's nothing we can do about it!

In the meantime I told the waitress what had happened, but she just smiled at me politely, like we were used to by now when we spoke English to somebody and they didn't understand. When André and the boys came back in I told them I did everything I could, but to no avail.

But lo and behold, about 15 minutes later, the waitress appeared again, *with the ball in her hands!!* "How?" I asked her. "I climbed roof", she said! I couldn't believe it! I mean, what are the chances of that actually happening?!

So all this time she understood me, and made a plan! And I thought I was wasting my time trying to explain to her what happened.

Now that's what I call casting your net out to the other side to catch the fish!

André tried getting the ball back himself. That didn't work. I asked for help, not really hoping that something would come of it, because how on earth would the waitress be able to get ball back if André couldn't? And to top it all she didn't seem to understand a word I was saying – and yet, that seemingly futile chat with our waiter, got us the ball back! And 2 very happy boys, who went straight out to play with that ball again!

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So, talking about casting your net out to the other side...

It wasn't long after Easter. So many things had happened, that the disciples felt as if their whole world had changed. Still they had to make a living somehow...

It was very early in the morning, they were in a boat on the Sea of Tiberias (which is the Roman name for the Sea of Galilee), doing what they did best – fishing. Or trying to, at least, because they didn't catch a single fish all night long.

It's not as if they didn't know what they were doing. Before they became Jesus' disciples that's what they did every single day of their lives, in that very same Sea.

It was custom for people to fish during the night, because that was the best time for *catching* fish, and it would also mean that you could go straight to the market in the early morning with the fresh fish you caught.

Try to imagine what it must have felt like for them: they were probably in emotional overload after everything that happened during the Easter weekend, just trying to get some normality back into their lives, when they had a hugely disappointing night out on the boat.

As the sun was coming up, someone was calling out to them from the shore: "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

It was customary for the fish buyers to wait on the beach early in the morning, so the fact that there was somebody standing there wouldn't have surprised them at all.

Early in the morning moisture would be hanging in the air and the fog would make it difficult for them to see *who* it was calling out them.

This stranger gave them advice that didn't seem to make any sense: "Throw your net out on the *right* side of the boat!" As if that would make any difference from having their net out on the left side of the boat!! Seriously?!

Nevertheless, they did it, and then caught so much fish that they were unable to haul the net in!

They still couldn't see who it was giving them these instructions, but they recognised him through his familiar actions – giving a simple solution to a seemingly unsolvable problem; meeting them in a miracle. So they realised that it was the risen Jesus standing on the shore, waiting for them.

And how right they were. When they saw the fish on the coals and the bread, they didn't need any further confirmation of who this stranger on the beach was. The disciples were in awe.

The risen Jesus came to meet them again, for the 3rd time, and did something so ordinary with them – have breakfast on the beach – that you would almost think that nothing has changed.

But they only had to take one look at the huge net of fish to remember that everything *did* change, literally everything. They were breaking bread with the RISEN Jesus, they were living a miracle, nothing would ever be the same again.

For the Jews in the 1st century the number 3 symbolised a *complete* testimony. So now that they saw the risen Jesus 3 times, they had all the evidence they needed to know that he was actually alive, they weren't only imagining things.

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Looking at this story from the outside, I find it quite interesting that the disciples immediately followed the advice Jesus gave them.

I mean – they were the professional fishermen, he was a *carpenter*, what would he know about fishing? And it would seem like very silly advice to give – how would there be lots of fish just at the other side of the boat? At the other side of the *lake* maybe, but the other side of the boat?!

But they obeyed straight away. By now experience must have taught them to never question Jesus – that although what he expects people to do doesn't always makes sense to *them*, he will have a reason for what he says or does.

Sometimes the answer to a problem is much simpler than we could ever imagine, and all we need to do to find that answer is to obey Jesus, even if it doesn't make any sense.

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The fact that Jesus rose from the dead didn't only change the disciples' lives, it changed our lives too. It gives us the ability to live with hope, to know that there is more to life than what one would expect.

But that doesn't mean that life is always easy. It's very often only at the point where we are ready to give up, that we can actually see Jesus standing on the horizon of our lives.

He is *always* there, but very often when things go smoothly for us, we easily forget that we need him. When things *don't* work out, we quickly realise that we need him, but then we often struggle to find him.

This story reminds us that he is always there – and if we just keep looking through the fog of our difficult circumstances, we will see him, standing there, waiting patiently for us to recognise him. Giving us instructions of how to make our situations better or how to understand what is happening to us... And if then we just listen to his commands, if we throw the net out to the other side of our boats, we *will* catch the fish, even if it is just a net full of ways to accept and cope with circumstances we cannot change...

I want to end my sermon with a wee story told by an American minister, called Wade Hughes Sr. It's about a weak, unwell man. Wade says that this man's condition grew worse, but he could not afford a doctor. He lived deep in the woods in an old log cabin, and out in front of his cabin was a huge boulder.

One night he had a vision. God told him to go out and push the massive rock in front of his home all day long, day after day, until he told him to stop. The man got up early in the morning, and with great excitement, he pushed on the rock as long as he could. After a rest he pushed some more. The night vision was so real that it inspired the man as he pushed against the rock. It gave meaning to his live again.

Each day he pushed a little harder and a little longer. Day after day he pushed. Days rolled into weeks, and weeks into months, as he faithfully pushed against the rock. After 8 months of pushing the rock, the man was getting tired of pushing the rock so much, and in his tiredness he started to doubt his dream. He measured from his porch to the rock, and with shock he realized he had not even moved the boulder an inch.

The man was so disappointed, because he saw his work had accomplished nothing. He was tired and his dream seemed dashed upon the rock.

He sat on his porch and cried, because he had invested so much time for nothing. But as the sun was setting in the west, Jesus came and sat down next to the man as he was sitting on his porch. He said, "Son, why are you so sad?" The man replied, "Lord, You know how sick and weak I am, and then the vision you gave me built up a false hope. I have pushed with all that was within me for many months, and that old rock is right where it was when I started."

Jesus said to him, "I never told you to move the rock, I told you to push against the rock." Jesus told the man to step in front of the mirror and look at himself.

The man obeyed, and was amazed at what he saw. How could he have missed this? He had been so unwell and weak, and what he saw in the mirror was a strong muscular man. He also realized that he had not been coughing all night anymore. It dawned on him that he had been feeling better for months, and it was all because he had been pushing — not moving — the rock.

Then the man realized, that the plan of God was not to change the position of the rock, but to change *him*. God's plan was not for the rock, but for him. *Understand the plan*. Trust what he is saying to you. Listen to God. Do what he says. Be obedient. It is not nearly as important for the rock in your life to be moved, as it is for you to push against it.

I know that this is just a story – but the message is clear. It is when you push against the rock that you become strong — whether the rock moves or not. It is when you obey and cast your net on the other side that the net is filled, and a way is opened up for deeper fellowship with Jesus.

So let's question less and obey more.

If nothing works out the way you planned, if you feel hopeless and uncertain about your future, don't despair – cast your net out to the other side, and be ready for God to rock your world!

Amen