

**Sermon**  
**28 April 2019**  
**West Kirk of Calder & Polbeth Harwood**

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Reading: John 21:1-14

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About 2000 years ago, there was a group of men, who, although they didn't know this at the time, would become very close friends.

They were all ordinary men, quite a few of them were fishermen by trade, and their daily routine was exactly the same, day in and day out... Until *one day*, out of the blue, everything changed.

That was the day they met Jesus.

Jesus told them to stop what they were busy with, and to come follow him; Because he would like to make them fishers of men. Just like that.

I think at least *some* of them might have been quite surprised at their own reaction – because they did exactly what Jesus asked them to do. They literally left their *lives* behind – their jobs, their responsibilities, their homes, their families, their loved ones – and they followed him.

For *three years* they did everything with Jesus. He taught them what it meant to belong to God – and they listened to him, learnt from him, and

worked alongside him. They lived very close to each other and they did absolutely everything together. They became more than brothers.

Jesus opened their eyes. It was as if for the first time in their lives they now understood what life really was about. Things made sense, and they wanted to make a difference in the world.

This new life became the only life for them. It was as if for the first time since they were born, they now knew that *this* was who they were meant to be. It was almost as if their previous lives never even existed... Until it all fell to pieces when Jesus was crucified.

All their hopes and dreams for a better future shattered. They were confused, disorientated, traumatised. They didn't understand it.

So what did they do? They stuck together.

When Mary told them that the tomb was empty and she saw Jesus, they still didn't understand. Even when Jesus appeared to *them*, things started to make a *wee bit* more sense, but they were still numb after everything they've been through.

And they were still confused. What should they do now? Jesus, the man who brought them all together, wasn't there anymore...

So they did the only thing that made sense to them – they went back to their former lives, to doing what they used to do before they met Jesus – they went back to the Sea of Galilee (or the Sea of Tiberias as it is called

in our reading – which is just the Roman name for the same place), and they went fishing.

And still they did this *together*. There were 7 of them.

Now as I've explained to you before – numbers had symbolical value in Biblical times. The number 7 indicated fulness. In other words, the 7 of them made up a complete group of chosen people. Everybody who needed to be there was there that day.

So they went fishing. All night long. It was common practice to fish during the night and to then sell the fish on the beach in the morning.

But they caught nothing.

As if it wasn't bad enough that the life they got to know over the past 3 years just fell apart, it now seemed as if they couldn't even do what they used to do every single day before that. What a disheartening place to be in.

But then someone from the shore shouted: "*Paidia*" – that's Greek for "children", expressing the relationship between a parent and child or teacher and disciple.

That word should have given away that it was Jesus, but they didn't realise that yet. Lots of fish merchants would gather on the beach early in the morning, so to see someone standing there wouldn't surprise them. And the very last person they were expecting to see was the risen Jesus.

They were so focussed on the difficult situation they were in, they didn't see what was right in front of their eyes.

But then Jesus *made* them see!

He advised them to throw the net out on the other side of the boat. What did they have to lose? So they did what he told them to do.

And *then* a miracle happened. All of a sudden, the net was filled to the brim. And THEN they realised that the man on the beach was Jesus, because who else could do a miracle like that?!

So Peter made himself decent – he didn't want to go meet his risen Lord without being dressed properly, and he jumped into the water to get to Jesus as quickly as he possibly could.

The others brought the boat and fish to shore. They counted 153 fish. There were 153 known species of fish in the Sea of Galilee, so this could be an indication that as fishers of men Jesus wanted them to share his message with all kinds of people. Nobody should be left out.

There on the beach Jesus had a little fire going, and they sat down together to have breakfast. They shared bread and fish. Like they always did. *And they just knew* – Jesus was with them.

Things might have not made any sense to them, but there, where they least expected him, Jesus was waiting on them and he gave them something to eat. A simple act of love and kindness.

They were tired and hungry. So Jesus didn't start of a long philosophical explanation of what happened to him and what he expected of them. All he did was give them a meal, and a miracle... And they understood.

This was the 3<sup>rd</sup> and last time the risen Jesus appeared to his disciples (as described in the Gospel according to John). And 3, for them, was the perfect number.

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You know what strikes me most in this story? The fact that the disciples stuck together. They didn't each go their own way to carry on with their previous lives... They stayed together.

And I think there is a very important lesson in that for us.

One of my favourite passages in the New Testament is Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them."

There is something uniquely special about being part of the community of believers. We share a bond that is almost impossible to describe to outsiders, but it's always there; that love, that holiness, that being in the presence of Christ; even in times and places we don't expect him at all.

And that is something I can truly testify to after being on sick leave. It was the knowledge of all of you caring for me, praying for me, waiting for me to come back, that kept me going.

I've had flowers in the house since the day I came home from hospital, and there is still a beautiful bundle on my coffee table. Every time I look at these flowers, I remember: I'm part of something special.

I received so many cards that it will probably take me a whole day to reread them all. To not even mention all the calls and messages and good thoughts and visits... And that made me feel so special, it reminded me that I am loved by my church family.

As the only grown-up member of my actual family, my dear husband of course also made me feel special in his own unique way. Being the man and the woman in the house took a toll on him, but bless, he's never been so quiet in his life! He was exhausted! But he told me that if I feel well enough to come back to church, he will happily resign from cleaning and laundry duties...

And then of course, there was the food! The doorbell would go and then there would stand an angel with dinner in their hands... And that brings us right back to our Bible story.

Because *that* is where we find Jesus – in sharing a meal together, in caring, in loving, in supporting, in understanding.

I felt low, but through you, Jesus carried me. And now I am ready to help with the carrying again.

So let's stick together. Because there is something to be said for being part of something bigger than just you're your own life.

And if you are not in a good place at the moment, if you don't know how to handle the situation life has thrown at you, if you are confused, alone, scared or weary – don't forget that we believe in a God who knows and understands everything. We believe in a God who knows where the fish are, a God who can do miracles.

Please remember – Jesus is always there, whether you see him or not. *And no matter what exactly this means to YOU, his advice is:* If you have spent all night catching nothing, just throw your net out on the other side. And who knows, you might be surprised with what you find there.

Amen