

Date: 28th April 2019

Talk: Peregian

Passage: John 21 1-19

How's your week been?

I guess many of you are back to work now or back to school after the Easter break

OK, for some of us (we retired ones) it's not like that is it?

But still, most of us are probably back to our usual routines.

Even church today is back to normal after all the excitement of Easter.

In fact I'm guessing that for most of us

life is pretty much as it was before the Easter break

But let's just stop and think a minute

We've just celebrated **the** most significant,

the most life changing event since creation

And within a week we're pretty much back to normal.

Is that right?

Is that how it should be?

Well that's what I want us to think about this morning

The old normal of before Easter

and the new normal after Easter.

And to help us think through this

I'm going to talk about the apostle Peter or Simon Peter as he's often referred to.

I love Peter.

I love his passion, his get up and go attitude, and his highs and lows

He's someone I relate to so well,

perhaps someone we can all relate to in one way or another.

And as we think through our reading this morning

we'll find it takes us back to a number of other accounts involving Peter.

So, looking at our passage for this morning, what's going on here?

Well, after the incredible events in Jerusalem,

The disciples are back in Galilee

Why?

Well that's where Jesus told them to go.

At their Passover meal he told them

"But after I have risen, I will go ahead of you into Galilee."

And later, when the two Marys meet Jesus after he has risen, he said to them

"Do not be afraid. Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me."

So that's why they are here, on the shores of Lake Galilee.

But just imagine what their state of mind must have been.

Jesus their Lord, their master,

Has been crucified

But then he rose from the dead - they knew because they had seen him, alive.

Others had reported seeing him alive.

So they might be back in Galilee,

But things were different

They certainly weren't normal.

You can imagine them can't you

Sitting on the beach, almost shell-shocked by what had happened,

Wondering what on earth they should do next.

And for Peter,

can you imagine his state of mind.

He's back where he first met Jesus, where he was first called to follow him.

For three years his life has been turned upside down,

He's followed a leader like no other,

He's seen and done amazing things

He's been in an incredibly close relationship with the Son of God ,

He's seen him killed and then he's seen him alive again.

But most of all Peter must have been carrying horrendous guilt

because of how he'd let Jesus down,

Denied him three times,

Doing exactly what Jesus had predicted,

What on earth should Peter do now?

Well I think, understandably, Peter goes fishing.

No, not the sort of Gone Fishing we do around here.

The leisurely, relaxing, past-time of fishing.

Peter is reverting back to what he knows.

He's getting back to his old work.

He was a fisher of fish before Jesus called him to be a fisher of men.

So he's back in his home village

Back in a boat, fishing in the Sea of Galilee.

In the absence of knowing what else to do, he's getting back to his old normal.

Something that feels comfortable and familiar

Something he's done all his life,

Something he knows how to do.

..... except it's not going well, is it?

They fish all night – but nothing.

Until Jesus appears.

Now at this stage, many of you are probably thinking “we've been here before”

Yes, this takes our minds straight back to when Jesus first called Peter.

Back in Luke Chapter 5

Jesus is teaching on the shore of the Sea of Galilee

There's a huge crowd pressing on him ,

so he gets into a boat – Simon Peter's boat, and continues teaching.

Once he's finished he tells Peter to cast the nets out again

Peter says

“Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

Guess what – they catch a huge number of fish.

How does Peter react?

Well we're told

When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus' knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!”

But Jesus replied *“Don’t be afraid; from now on you will fish for people.”*

And the account in Luke finished with the words:

“So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.”

There are so many similarities aren’t there?

Fishing is going badly,

Jesus appears and instructs them

They follow his instructions and catch an incredible amount of fish

It’s no wonder that our minds go back to this account in Luke.

I’m betting that Peter’s mind went right back to that time too.

Yet look at Peter’s reaction – it’s radically different.

In their first encounter, Jesus had actually been teaching from Peter’s boat

So he couldn’t help but hear what Jesus was saying

And as a result, Peter understood that he, Peter, was full of sin.

Too unworthy to be anywhere near someone who was clearly a man of God, a great teacher.

So he tried to put distance between himself and Jesus

“Go away from me Lord, I am a sinful man” he says

Perhaps that’s how some of us have felt before.

Feeling that we’re too sinful to come before Jesus,

Instead keeping him at arms length.

That’s understandable when you only know Jesus, as Peter did back then,

as a great teacher or leader, someone who drew crowds,

someone to respect from a distance

But now Peter knows Jesus intimately.

He's spent three years with him,

He's formed such a close bond with him

And so, in the passage we read this morning,

his reaction is entirely the opposite.

Peter is still full of sin,

but now he's so keen to get to Jesus

that he can't even wait for the boat to get there.

Instead, the ever-impetuous Peter jumps into the water and races there himself.

Leaving the other disciples to follow with the boat and the net full of fish.

And as in many other situations, Jesus is waiting, ready with a meal for them.

But let me clarify a couple of things here.

I don't think this is in any way meant to be a re-enactment of the Lord's supper,

Nor do I think this is meant to be an echo of the feeding of the five thousand.

But it is yet another sign of his endless grace and provision,

Just like their morning's huge catch of fish.

Now, as an aside, and pretty irrelevant to the rest of what I'm talking about.

Verse 11

Are you wondering about 153 fish

Why are we told this?

What's the significance of the number 153?

Well, let me tell you

It's almost worth googling it to see the array of possibilities – I did!

There are some wonderful theories on this number –

some based on divine mathematics,

others to do with the number of fish species at the time.

Imaginations gone wild I tell you

But, in my view – it was a big catch – an unusually big catch

so they counted, just to see how many fish they'd actually caught.

And because this is an eye witness account – John was there

he remembered the number – because it was a big number.

But that's just my view.

What I do take from this though is that, as in so many of Jesus' miracles,

what we again see here is a foretaste of what is to come – bounteous provision

Not just enough provision

But overwhelming, unimaginable, bounteous provision – just waiting for us.

Anyway, back to Peter.

After their meal together, Jesus turns to Peter.

And here we have such a poignant interaction between them.

In full view of all the other disciples, Jesus confronts Peter.

Again, imagine what this must have been like for Peter.

At the forefront of his mind

would have been the memory of how badly he'd let Jesus down

When he'd denied Jesus three times.

He must have been full of doubts concerning where he now stood with Jesus.

Maybe he feared that Jesus might say something like,

"Peter, why did you do it, why did you deny me?"

Or "How could you Peter, how could you do something that awful?"

But this isn't Jesus' way.

He has too much compassion to twist the knife of guilt any further.

Rather, his goal was to remove Peter's guilt,

to cut out the shame and the ache from his heart.

So he makes absolutely no reference to what Peter had done.

But he does ask Peter a very searching question

Verse 15 *"do you love me more than these?"*

More than what? More than the fish?

No, this is a subtle reference to Peter's boast in the upper room at the last supper,

where he stated that even if all the other disciples fled, he never would.

Jesus was really asking, "Peter, are you still willing to make that claim?"

Peter wasn't.

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

In his reply Peter declares his love for Jesus,

but he doesn't compare himself with anyone else.

The man who had previously been so boastful, so sure of himself, so confident of his own courage,

Now stands humbled before Jesus.

Jesus asks him twice more "Do you love me?"

As painful as this was, it was absolutely necessary.

He's getting rid of Peter's guilt and shame by dealing with it openly.

Why did Jesus ask Peter three times, "Do you love me?"

Because Peter had denied him three times.

Why did he do this publicly?

Because Peter had denied him publicly.

The other disciples needed to hear Peter openly declare his love for Jesus.

Peter himself needed to openly declare his love for Jesus

Did it work?

Did it produce the desired healing?

Yes. Peter never denied Christ again.

And just a few days later, as we can read in Acts 2,

on the Day of Pentecost, fully restored,

Peter stood in the temple courts and preached an incredible gospel sermon

to the very men who had crucified Jesus.

Three thousand people were saved that day.

The old Peter was gone forever.

A new man was born when Jesus restored his fallen disciple.

Do you know this was one of the great Aha moments I had a few years back.

I'm sure that many of us from time to time have had doubts about what we believe.

And at this time of year it's not uncommon to have doubts about the resurrection.

Did it really happen?

Did Jesus really rise from the dead?

I know I've questioned this myself in the past.

But my aha moment came

when I realised just how radical a transformation Peter underwent.

Peter, the impulsive and at times brash disciple, who got it wrong as often as he got it right.

Peter who tried to save himself by denying he knew or had anything to do with Jesus.

But after he had seen the resurrected Christ

We see a new Peter,

a great orator,

a great leader of the early church

And someone who died and died horribly rather than denounce Christ.

There is no other explanation for this radical change in Peter.

Christ's death and resurrection was the turning point for him.

The Peter after the resurrection

After his encounters with the risen Lord,

Was a radically transformed man.

And this, this is the incredible transformation we too can all have

When we come before our risen Lord,

When we stand before him humbly,

And ask him to take our sin and guilt away.

Because of what happened at Easter, we can have a new normal

one where, just like Peter, we too can be restored before Jesus and before God.

That's why I love this passage

It shows that all of us Peter-types can be confident
that though we fall again and again,
by God's grace we can keep on getting back up.

What mercy!

What grace!

But I'm not done yet, there's more to talk about here.

Because the transformation doesn't end with receiving God's mercy

That isn't the end point for any of us

And it certainly wasn't the end point for Peter

Because when Peter confirms his love for Jesus three times

look at how Jesus responds to Peter each time.

He doesn't say

Yes thank you Peter

Oh that's nice Peter

Now you can feel much better about yourself Peter.

No, he says

Feed my lambs

Take care of my sheep

Feed my sheep

He's saying "Peter there's stuff to do now"

He's saying "Peter if you love me, do the mission I've called you to"

And for Peter this is a brand new mission.

When Jesus first called him to be a disciple he said

“From now on you will fish for people”

Peter’s last three years have been spent in this mission

sharing the gospel and calling people to follow Jesus.

But what’s his commission now?

To be a shepherd.

To feed and tend Jesus’ people.

And the mark of Peter’s love for Jesus is shown in his obedience to this calling.

He became the shepherd of the early church

for 35 years he lived out his new commission

feeding and tending Jesus’ people.

Living out his obedient love for Jesus.

And in verse 18 Jesus spells out what the cost of this obedient love will be.

He contrasts Peter's youth, his life up to this point, with what is coming.

Previously he says, Peter has been able to do what he wants and go where he will.

But when he is old, Jesus tells him,

“you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go”

This is an explicit contrast between Peter's old life of self- will

and his new life under the will of Jesus.

He has just submitted in loving obedience to Jesus,

and now Jesus says such submission is going to include being taken where he does not want to go.

It sounds remarkably like the prediction of Peter's death – doesn't it.

And he was put to death because of his love for Jesus.

So, having spelled out his will for Peter, Jesus finishes by calling Peter to follow him.

This isn't the first time he's told Peter to "follow me."

But this time it's different.

This time there's no room for Peter's denial, for his doubts.

This time Peter is to follow Jesus all the way.

In love.

In ministering to others.

In spreading the Good News.

In life.

In death.

This was Peter's new normal –

to follow Jesus completely and wholeheartedly and sacrificially.

So, what about us

Here we are the other side of Easter.

Where are you?

Are you where Peter started in this account

back fishing

Back to your old life

Back to normal?

Well can I urge you,

Follow Peter's example of life after Easter

Race towards Jesus

Stand before him humbly

Allow him to take your sin and shame away, just as he did for Peter,

Love him as openly as Peter loved him.

But don't stop there

Because just like for Peter, there's stuff for all of us to do.

There's fishing and there's shepherding.

Now don't get me wrong, our calling is not the same as Peter's

We were not called to fish in the same way,

as a disciple of Jesus, roaming the countryside teaching and healing.

But we do have a part to play in this fishing business

Because we also are called to share the gospel whenever we can.

And similarly we're not all called to be Shepherds, as Peter was.

Of course Mark and Chris and Gary are called to shepherd in many of the ways Peter was

To lead and to teach and to pastor Jesus' people

But the rest of us are not called to this.

But that doesn't mean we don't carry some of the responsibility for shepherding,

Because we are called to love and take care of one another,

To encourage and support each other in reading and understanding the bible,

To help disciple one another and particularly any newer or younger Christians amongst us.

So there is definitely some shepherding stuff for us to do as well.

Peter's new commission, his new normal after Easter

was something amazing and unique and challenging.

It's unlikely that any of us here this morning will be called to a ministry as amazing and unique and challenging as Peter's was.

But we are called to show our obedient love for Jesus in the same way.

And loving Jesus isn't passive.

Because if we love Jesus...then feeling something isn't good enough.

Thinking things in our minds and hearts isn't enough.

We need to live it.

We need to follow Jesus. All the way.

We know what Peter's new life, his new normal was after Easter.

What's yours going to be?

Let me pray us.

Father, Thank you that because of what you did at Easter, each one of us can stand humbly before you and have our guilt and shame removed. Thank you that because of Easter we too can encounter the risen Lord. Help us to be people who live transformed lives. Show us your will for each of us, help us to respond with obedient love, and give us the strength and courage to continue your work of fishing and shepherding. Amen