

## HOLY TRINITY SUNNINGDALE

Readings: Rev 5:11-14

John 21:1-19

Date: Sunday 10 April 2016

Theme: On the beach

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I don't know about you but I really love Easter. I think I love it because there is so much emotion around, in the activity focussed into such a short period of time.

In my bible reading recently I have been reminded that opposition to Jesus and his ministry started very early on indeed. But it's only in the final days of Palm Sunday and Holy Week that the lovers and the haters have their day and the whole thing comes to an extraordinary crescendo with the glory and the wonder and the miracle of that first Easter Day.

John, of course, is one of the four tellers of this fantastic story. And in chapter 20 it's all about Mary, Peter, John and Thomas. In chapter 21 it's really all about Peter.

And it takes place on the beach. I love the beach. I love the sea. Holidays on the East Coast in places like Whitby, Scarborough, Filey and Robin Hoods Bay were part of my growing up. Each year we take a post-aster retreat to Sussex. We often go to Bognor, but this year we explored Littlehampton, which is actually nearer. And we go there again on one of our Cooke's Tours in June.

Peter has been one of Jesus' most ardent fans. Peter, James and John were the three privileged to spend time with him at key moments in his ministry: especially on the Mount of Transfiguration and in the Garden of Gethsemane. Peter identified Jesus as the Christ, the Son of the Living God. But Peter also denied him three times before the cock crowed.

I kind of get Peter – he was an ardent fan, but he could see from very close up where this was all heading ... and when the chips were down he was just not up to the job. He was like me and like you when the time came to be counted, he bottled it and let Jesus down. How many times do we do that too?

And yet, it's Peter, John and Mary who have the experience of the first Easter Day early where they are running hither and thither and encountering the risen Lord. Trying to make sense of their dead friend now alive again and wondering what on earth this might mean for them.

At the start of chapter 21, Peter is once again out on the water. Some commentators think that this meant he had given up on Jesus and returned to the trade he knew so well. Peter knew about fish. But I am not so sure. There's something about doing a familiar thing with friends, as you try to work out what to do next, what to make of what you've seen and what to think about dead people rising. And maybe as this whole deal had started at the waterfront, Peter goes back there to the lakeside to remember and to reflect on it all. Doing something very practical, very physical in a time of bereavement or

wondering is often a very good thing to do. For those with depression, exercise and fresh air is often on doctor's orders.

Like Easter Day itself, at first they don't recognise Jesus. They hear his question. They do what he suggests and they catch a huge haul of fish. But it's John who recognises him and tells Peter, but it's Peter who puts on his clothes and jumps into the water. And it's Peter who drags the net ashore.

I believe that this is all part of Peter's growing realisation that Jesus is who he said he was, has done what he said he would do, and is alive. You know how sometimes you can't just get your head around what has happened ... it takes time. This is Peter living through the processing and thinking it all through. He wants to believe it. He wants to be near Jesus. And he demonstrates he is the active, "let's get our hands dirty, guys", kind of disciple.

Peter is putting himself in a place where Jesus can speak to him and have a life-changing conversation with him. And Jesus now takes him to one side, as we shall see in a moment.

But before we get there, let's just pause. Peter has been so up and down. Captivated by Jesus, responsive to him, close to him, ready to die for him – or so he said. And then remote from him, distant from him, fearful.

On Easter Day, he is up and at it again. Engaging, intrigued and wanting it to be true. And I just wonder if this

isn't how it is for many of us? Our journey towards Jesus is not a smooth curve up and to the right. It's not a journey without bumps and scrapes along the way. It's not a journey that always seems to make sense – and we muck it up sometimes and we get it wrong sometimes and we need to regroup. If this is us, we are just like Peter and what we can learn from him is that this is OK.

And we know it's OK because Jesus takes the initiative and makes it OK.

*When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter ... do you love me more than these?*

In fact three times, Jesus asks Peter does he love him and three times he gives him a positive reply:

*Feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep*

In spite of all the ups and downs, the fiery and feisty and hot-headed talk about following Jesus as well as the shameful disowning of his master and friend, in spite of all of this, Jesus sets Peter back on his feet and in effect says: I know. I understand. It's OK. There is still work I have for you to do.

Jesus is supremely the one for giving people a second chance. He knows that reform and repentance and new beginnings are possible. He is in the forgiveness business. He is well able to wipe the slate clean. He may not forget. But he does forgive.

On Friday I was listening to John Timpson on Desert Island Discs. John is the man behind the company that cuts keys and fixes shoes in over 1400 outlets all over the UK. He didn't say he was a Christian but he might well be. 10% of his staff are ex-cons. People who have committed a crime, served their time, and come out determined to make a better go of it second time round. Determined not to go back to the life they knew before. Confident, maybe through skills they have learned in prison, to want to contribute to society in a more productive and a more helpful way.

Whether John Timpson is a Christian or not is to some extent by the by. This is kingdom thinking, entrepreneurial thinking, Jesus thinking, which does not ignore the past, but does not allow the past to dictate or limit or undermine the future and all its possibilities.

Peter, of course, would go on to found the church, to make disciples, to write letters and engage in exciting ministry and mission. Ultimately, it would cost him his life. But there was much still to be done before that day came.

Are we also in the forgiveness business? Are we those who know we have mucked up and need to hear the Lord say it's OK? Are we those who have been mucked about and need to let go of some past hurt or unforgiveness of others in our family or amongst our friends and acquaintances?

Life could effectively have come to an end for Peter that night by the brazier when he said for the third time that he

didn't know Jesus and didn't associate with him or know anything about him.

But the bible throughout is full of the surprising and the extraordinary and the unexpected. It's not over for Peter. It's OK and there is work still for him to do.

This season of Easter, with all its roller coaster emotional activity in the characters we have met, with all its promise of life out of death, with all its new hope and new chances, new starts and new dreams, we celebrate all that God gives us and we simply ask that, like Peter, he will find work for us to do too, which will bring him honour and greater glory. Amen.

Let's pray ...