



## JOY COMES WITH THE DAWN

### Third Sunday of Easter – A Reflection on John 21: 1-19

All four Gospels contain stories of the appearances of the risen Christ to the women and the disciples after the Resurrection. Our Gospel today is another of these Easter narratives where the disciples encounter the risen Jesus in a familiar situation but in an unfamiliar form.

With all appearance narratives the problem is recognition, that is, the women and the disciples cannot make the immediate connection between the Jesus of Nazareth they knew in his public ministry and the Christ of faith who now appears before them. The famous story of doubting Thomas (John 20:19- 29) is a good illustration of this theme. Jesus makes the connection for them by pointing to his wounds, that is, a form of physical proof or demonstration. However, the key connection that Jesus wants the disciples to make is that of faith. The only narrative where a disciple observer makes the key connection between the Jesus of ministry and the Christ of faith is the beloved disciple at the tomb on Sunday morning: he sees, and he believes (John 20, verse 9). The beloved disciple recognises in faith the risen Lord whom he knew and loved in the public ministry.

The appearance narrative in our Gospel today is set at the Sea of Galilee (Tiberias). In confusion and bewilderment, Peter and his companions have returned to what is familiar: fishing. As the story unfolds it becomes clear that the two main characters in the narrative are Peter and the beloved disciple (who always remains unnamed). Peter and the beloved disciple are paired. We have already seen this same pairing in John's narrative in the earlier story of the race to the tomb on the Sunday morning (20:1-10). Guided by the actions of Peter and the beloved disciple in this story, the group of disciples comes to recognise Jesus as risen Lord on the lakeshore as they have breakfast.

In many respects our Gospel story today is a very homely scene: friends having breakfast together in the early morning in the quiet and secluded shore of the lake. In this homely situation John's theme of recognition dawns as light. The story began in the darkness of night and with the appearance of Jesus the light slowly emerges. What we see is the joy that dawns on the disciples at the beginning of this day as they sit in the presence of Jesus. The confusion and bewilderment of his crucifixion and burial now vanishes in the light of his presence amongst them.

There is of course more to this homely scene than simply a gathering of friends. Christ offers nourishment not only in the breakfast provided but in the joy of his presence. As the meal and conversation progress, a number of key Johannine themes begin to emerge: the communion established between them in a bonding relationship, the forgiveness Jesus offers Peter for the betrayal, and the commission to the disciples to be joyful bearers of good news.

The conversation between Christ and Peter in the presence of the other disciples is quite moving. In response to the three questions of Jesus, Peter offers an embarrassed but honest protestation of his love. Clearly the threefold protestation is meant to mirror the threefold denial of Christ by Peter in the Passion narrative (John 18:25-27). Jesus forgives Peter. Peter is now able to make a full and unconditional commitment to Jesus. On his part Jesus signals that forgiveness to Peter by commissioning him to be a shepherd. Again, the image of the shepherd is key in John's Gospel, particularly the representation of Jesus as the Good Shepherd (John 10:1-18). Peter is commissioned to become a shepherd too. He is to bring the divine life abundantly to those committed to his care. Like the Good Shepherd, Peter is to lay down his life for the sheep. His martyrdom is alluded to at the end of the story (Verse 18).

This Easter story clearly presents the communion between the risen Lord and his disciples in the simple act of sharing a meal. The relationship between them all manifests itself in the love they share, the reconciliation which is offered and received, and the sense of a shared mission. The bonds of their unity are created and sustained. The story therefore is not simply about a wonderful gathering on the lakeshore but a story which illustrates the centrality of communion to the family of disciples and believers. Communion is a key part of the theme of the upcoming Synod. Our story concludes with the commission of Jesus to the disciples on the lakeshore with the simple words "Follow me" (Verse 19). In these simple words of the risen Christ we have invitation, empowerment, fellowship, and communion with him and with each other.

By Very Rev. Dr Brian Boyle EV

Diocese of Sandhurst