

Sermon preached at Gisborne, 1 May 2022

*Lord Christ, we believe in you. Help our unbelief. Amen.*

John 21:1-19

### *Breakfast on the beach*

When we hear *breakfast on the beach*, the first thing that comes to mind may be an image of a holiday morning. But in John, the breakfast on the beach is the time of recovery from failure; it is for the sustenance of the disciples and preparing them for the continuing mission. Jesus' post-resurrection appearance revolves around before and after breakfast. Before breakfast, the disciples obeyed a strange instruction by an unknown person. After the catch of fish, they are invited to breakfast on the beach. They know it is the Lord by this time, and then Peter is reinstated as a leader and follower.

### *A strange instruction*

The decision of Peter and the disciples to go fishing makes us wonder what happened to them. Despite their encounter with the risen Jesus, Peter and other disciples have returned to the occupation that they know best. Yet it is already prophesied in John 16:32, which reads, “The hour is coming, indeed it has come, when you will be scattered, each one to his home, and you will leave me alone. Yet I am not alone because the Father is with me.” The disciples have lost their beloved teacher and the Lord, and their mission seems to have failed. Now they return to their home town. For them, fishing is one of the aimless activities done in desperation. But it is unsuccessful, for, without Jesus, they can do nothing.<sup>1</sup> It is at this lowest point that Jesus comes to reveal himself, not by his appearance but by his words and deeds. They followed Jesus’ instructions even before they knew who he was. The marvellous catch of fish allows them to recognize who he is, for who else could do such a sign? The catch of fish together with the unbroken net testify that Jesus is truly risen and has been seen by witnesses who, in turn, have been sent forth to proclaim him to other people. But the disciples need to be restored physically and spiritually before being sent out.

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<sup>1</sup> John 15:5 I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit because apart from me, you can do nothing.

## *The breakfast*

Now we see Jesus on the shore welcoming the disciples and providing them with a breakfast of fish and bread.<sup>2</sup> Jesus had fed people alongside the Sea of Galilee before when a large crowd were following him.<sup>3</sup> On this morning, before Peter finally draws the full net ashore, Jesus as host has prepared the meal and later serves it to his hungry guests, saying, “Come and have breakfast.” Although there is no mention of blessing or breaking bread, it reminds us of the last supper in that Jesus cares for both the disciples’ physical and spiritual needs by washing their feet and breaking the bread. This breakfast on the beach reminds the disciples of the meal with Jesus before the Passion. It becomes the time of renewal for the disciples, as they are able to recognize Jesus as Lord.<sup>4</sup>

## *A new task*

Now Jesus is reinstating Peter as both leader and follower.<sup>5</sup> Three times Peter failed Jesus precisely at the time of his trial before the high priest.<sup>6</sup> Now, he is asked by Jesus three times about his devotion and three times commissioned to be a shepherd with responsibility for the flock. In the threefold questioning and commissioning, Peter was hurt because Jesus repeated the query a third time.<sup>7</sup> The reinstatement means Peter’s life is entirely in God’s hands. As both leader and follower of Jesus, his end is not one he would choose for himself, but an end that nevertheless glorifies God. As such, the reinstatement of Peter is not a story of the overcoming of obstacles and the achievement of great successes. It is marked by danger, risk, and the loss of control that feature the faithful lives of disciples. Jesus’ final words, “Follow me”, allows us to go back to the beginning of the gospel of John – the Word became flesh. The embodiment of the Word can only be realized when we are living by the Word, not only when we are in the Church but always.

What does it tell us today? Last week, I attended the Special General Assembly via zoom for three days. Discussions were vigorous, and debates were intense. Among many proposals and

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<sup>2</sup> John 21:9-14

<sup>3</sup> Cf John 6:11 - Then Jesus took the loaves, and when he had given thanks, he distributed them to those who were seated; so also the fish, as much as they wanted; John 21:13 -Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

<sup>4</sup> John 21:12

<sup>5</sup> John 21:15-19

<sup>6</sup> John 18:12-27

<sup>7</sup> John 21:17

recommendations, education for all church people and exploring new pathways to serve God's people was inspiring. The report from Theology of Property and money: Sharing Resources Task Group (TPM) was very informative as we also have building-related issues that require our urgent attention. The report of TPM begins like this: like Nehemiah, they set out to examine the walls and gates to view 'how the Church really is' through many visits to presbyteries, reviewing statistics, meeting with many people, and taking surveys with three rounds of consultation. What they found was that many churches experience declining congregations; they are dealing with buildings that are deteriorating, requiring earthquake strengthening and/or not fit for purpose for the past two decades. The TPM task group strongly recommend that now is the time to share resources within all levels of the Church. Responding to this, General Assembly favoured a recommendation that will investigate amending or replacing the Presbyterian Church Property Act 1885. If the investigation is successfully done, it will be presented to the parliament to change the law. In addition, the property issues that local congregations have will not solely be the congregations' problems, but presbyteries and the property workgroup will help this out. The Church is trying to develop a gracious covenant for the generous sharing of resources too.

As the surrounding society changes, the Church is trying to adapt to these changes in the way it views its money and property. So far, many of the key decisions about the use of money and property have been in the hands of congregations and presbyteries. But the TPM task group encourages a movement toward a more collective mindset. The group continues that sharing our resources in the service of God's mission is a theological mandate, which is our underlying reason for being the Church. With education for all areas of life in the Church, I could see that the Church is changing the ways that we used to do in the past. The Church is truly endeavouring to be renewed and reformed by faithfully reading scripture and living by it. General Assembly was like sitting for breakfast on the beach with others. In the meeting, we were listening to the Holy Spirit; we were able to review the past and set out plans and directions for the future. In the reading in John, we don't hear much about the nets and boats left behind because they were given a new task - feeding Jesus' sheep. As we read in the Acts of the Apostles, they never returned to their boat and nets again. They faithfully lived as the shepherds of God's sheep. The breakfast prepared by the risen Jesus was indeed the Eucharist as the disciples were able to recognize the risen Lord, restored, and recommissioned. We have the same task - feeding God's sheep. Presently we have building issues which we can compare with fixing the nets and boats. Issues and problems need to be dealt with carefully as we are

entitled to be stewards of resources from God. Yet, it should not hinder us from fulfilling the purpose of the Church to feed God's sheep. May God help us see things anew and do things faithfully according to the living gospel – Christ Jesus as his undershepherds. Amen