

Bennochy church 5th May 2019

You haven't seen someone for a while. They have changed a bit. You un-expectantly bump into them, and you need a second look to recognise who it is and then you say, *you haven't changed a bit.*

In the account of John chapter 21, in spite of the fact they had already met the risen Christ in their locked room and, there was that famous encounter between Jesus and Thomas, on this occasion, they fail to recognise who Jesus is. Now, we are going to give them the benefit of the doubt, as the sun was just rising, and squinting into the sun, they only see the outline of a figure on the beach. So we can forgive them for not recognising Jesus.

What is interesting, is what Jesus says to them, "*young men, haven't you caught anything?*" He knew who they were, so why not shout out their names, *John, Peter, Thomas or Nathanael. It's me.* For some reason he keeps his identity a mystery, and, he knew the answer to his own question. They had caught absolutely nothing.

Wait a minute. Just wait a minute. Has this not happened before? All night fishing. No catch. A man from the shore tells us, *go out a bit further into the deeper water and cast your nets ... so many fish. It can't be.* John says to Peter, *It is the Lord!*

Who was the man who walked on water? Well he has another go! If anyone was going to jump out of the boat, it was going to

be Peter. This time he swims to shore. No help required. Always impetuous and wanting to be first there. Remember, first to the tomb and now first to meet Jesus on the beach. The others come behind on the boat. Staying dry, and of course, not forgetting, their large catch.

I think it is a great image. In following Jesus are we risk takers, water walkers, 'jumpers - out - of - the - boat' people, willing to leave its safe space and trust in the hand of Jesus, or, as John Ortberg so eloquently puts it, in his book, *If you want to walk on water, you need to get out of the boat, you can play it safe, and be 'boat potatoes'.*

Bread and wine in an upper room. Fish and bread on a beach. Jesus saw great significance in shared meals. I believe as a congregation we can learn from that. Where better to get to know people than around a table of food. But in this particular story there does not seem to be enough food to go round. Jesus needs more fish, and who goes back to the boat, and drags the net ashore? You guessed it, it's that man Peter!

153 big fish are in the net dragged onto the beach. Any significance in that number? Well, the interpretations are numerous. One example. If you add, $1+2+3...+16+17 = 153$. So what is the significance of 17. According to one of the early church fathers, his name was Augustine, that is the 10 commandments +, the 7 spirits of God in the heavenly realm, up to and including Saturn. Got that!

I think there was such a surprise at the size of the catch, that someone said, you know what, we need to add this lot up, and find out how many fish we actually caught , and remember, the catch would then have been divided up amongst them. In other words, the number 153 stuck in Johns head , not because it had any significance in itself, but it might have been the largest catch they ever had. You remember these things. 153.

On the beach, they knew it was Jesus , yet they dare not speak his name or ask him direct. *Come and eat*, he says. Bread and wine in an upper room. Bread in fish on the beach. I wonder if were they transported back to Jerusalem. *This is my body, broken for you.*

I think we meet God in all sorts of different places. In 'upper rooms' and on 'beaches'. There will be times when we do not recognise him and times we will keep silent. Times when we will, in faith, jump out of the boat, and times when we will stay dry within its security. Yet, in all time and in all places, we will receive from the hand of Jesus. He will say to us, *Come and eat.*

In eating we draw together, but we cannot stay in the upper room, or on the beach. As Jesus leaves, he says, put down the bread, finish your fish, pick up your cross, and , *come, follow me.* Amen.