

Easter 3, 14/4/2013, Holy Trinity
John 21:1-19

The end of the Gospel reading for last Sunday seemed to indicate that Chapter 20 was the end of the Gospel according to John.

Now with to-day's reading from Chapter 21, it seems as though John's Gospel is starting afresh with stories that should have been included in the earlier chapters.

These are stories about the risen Jesus but not only about him.

They are also about the leaders of the Christian community.

If we think of the appearances of Jesus in the post-resurrection period in almost every occasion they are tied in with Jesus commissioning someone, for example, when Jesus appeared to the disciples in the room where the door was locked he said to them, "as the Father has sent me, I am sending you".

In this way the presence of Jesus is strongly linked with the sense of calling.

In this morning's reading we have from the true shepherd Peter's call to shepherd the Christian flock.

But it is more than that: it is about reconciliation and deep forgiveness.

In the pre-resurrection period, Jesus had predicted that Peter would deny Jesus three times, which you know happened before cock crow and he fled from the scene of the crucifixion.

Peter at that stage became a figure of guilt and shame.

Now in this incident with the risen Jesus, reconciliation is brought about and deep forgiveness is given.

Peter announces that he is going fishing and several of the disciples decide to go along.

Remember that Peter and several of the disciples had been professional fishermen prior to Jesus coming on the scene.

So they toiled all night but they caught no fish.

Now on top of his guilt and shame at having denied Jesus, he is confronted with failure in something that he had done for a living for most of his working life.

But as the dawn breaks, the disciples see a man on the shore and the smoke of a small fire.

The stranger calls out to them and suggests that they cast the nets on the other side of the boat.

The disciples comply and suddenly the net is bursting with fish.

The beloved disciple shouts, "It is the Lord" and Peter clammers over the side of the boat, wearing an improvised swimsuit, to make his way to the shore with his heart bursting with excitement.

Jesus invites them to come and have breakfast as though it was a normal event after a night's fishing.

There is, however, specific business to be done with Peter.

Peter is a stand-in for us.

He is impetuous, enthusiastic, has a lack of understanding and an enormous love for Jesus.

He is just like many of us.

Now Jesus speaks directly to Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?"

He asks Peter three times, and three times Peter affirms his love for Jesus and each time Jesus tells him what to do with that love: feed my sheep.

Even though the word "forgiveness" does not appear in the dialogue this is an important part of the theme.

Peter is given a chance to face the risen Lord and begin again.

What, then, does the resurrection mean for us as individuals?

We are forgiven. We are invited to start over. We are completely loved and we have a job to do.

The same applies to our faith community.

Concerning the decisions we make: are they based on fear of failure or do they show we have the risen life of Jesus within us and take us outside our comfort zone?

Are we pointing forward with the light of the Resurrection at our backs?

Do we believe as a faith community that we are completely loved, completely forgiven with the Resurrected life of Jesus within us.

Do we believe that no person is beyond the pale, no one is outside of God's complete, unconditional love?

There is no question about my final statement we are commissioned to feed the flock with the life of the Risen Christ.