

Sunday Morning Resources

Sunday 4 May 2025 - The Third Sunday of Easter

Lectionary Readings (depending on the kind of service you are leading, you may use one or more of the following readings – however, you **must** use the gospel reading, as this is what the homily is based on)

Zephaniah 3.14-end]; Acts 9.1-6 [7-20]; Psalm 30; Revelation 5.11-end; John 21.1-19

Homily

Today's homily has been written by the Revd Phil Marsh, Priest in Charge, Ely Benefice

It is fascinating, isn't it, how quickly we fall back into what feels familiar, especially when we're unsure of what comes next?

In the opening of John 21, we find Peter declaring - "I'm going fishing." It's a simple enough statement, but perhaps odd given all that has happened? Yet we might see in it something familiar to us — familiar routines bring comfort in uncertain times. The disciples are perhaps caught in that uneasy space between promise and uncertainty. Christ is risen, they have witnessed the empty tomb, they've seen him a number of times, in John's gospel he has 'breathed' his Holy Spirit on them, and now? Well now what? What's next? They have risen from terrible despair to jubilant joy and must now be wondering just what to make of it all, caught between hope and reality, and even seen the risen Jesus himself. Yet now, in this prolonged season of waiting, perhaps doubt creeps back in. What should they do now? Is it possible that in the absence of knowing, Peter turns instinctively to the life he knew before Jesus called him: fishing?

Have we, too, maybe in times of uncertainty or disappointment, reverted to what's comfortable or known, rather than stepping boldly into the uncertain future God has promised? Perhaps like the disciples, we have moments of great expectations followed by equally great disappointments, leaving us unsure how to respond to the call of the risen Christ. We find ourselves lingering in familiar places because familiarity offers an illusion of control. Yet, as comfortable as the known may feel, it seldom leads us forward into the newness God intends.

Yet this return to the familiar task of fishing sets the stage for an encounter that points to a number of truths about 'what lies ahead', not just for the disciples but for us all.

Jesus appears on the shore, unrecognized at first. "Friends," he calls out, "haven't you any fish?" After a long, fruitless night, the disciples admit their failure. With a simple instruction—"Throw your net on the right side of the boat"—their empty nets are suddenly bursting, strained by the abundance of fish. This miraculous catch echoes previous moments of abundance — the wedding at Cana, where water became abundant wine, and the feeding of the 5,000, where a modest offering became a lavish feast. These moments of abundance are presented as a hallmark of God's kingdom, reminding us that scarcity is never the final

word when Jesus is involved, and that if we, like the disciples, are uncertain as to what comes next, the abundance of God's kingdom always lies ahead of us, and promised.

The exact significance of the specific number—153 fish—might be lost without ancient insight and understanding, but even to our modern readers ears, the precision itself speaks volumes about God's intentionality and the expansiveness of his grace. Ancient readers may have seen this number as representing diversity or completeness, suggesting that the gospel's nets would gather all kinds of people, mirroring the lavishness and inclusivity of God's kingdom. This abundant catch signifies not just quantity but quality—the richness of diversity and inclusion, hinting at the universal scope of Christ's mission.

And of course, here is the second reminder of what lies ahead. Christ's very first calling of the disciples was that they might become fishers of people. Christ's calling of us all is to share his good news far and wide. This act of fishing is and of itself a reminder of what lies ahead for all of us.

Thirdly, beneath this abundant blessing lies a deeper truth taught by Jesus earlier in John's Gospel: "apart from me you can do nothing". The disciples' own strength yields empty nets. It is only when guided by Jesus' voice, obedient to his direction, that their work bears abundant fruit. In this encounter the stark contrast between human striving and divine provision are neatly demonstrated, reminding us that our effectiveness in mission is not measured by our abilities but by our faithfulness and obedience to Christ's direction. And more, what lies ahead is life lived out hand in hand with Christ.

This may be enough, but Jesus doesn't stop at the promise of abundance, or a reminder of the call to mission, or the assurance of his provision in it all. He invites the weary fishermen to breakfast, lovingly preparing a meal for them. Here, on the shoreline, scarcity becomes abundance, failure is transformed into blessing, and ordinary fishermen are again called to extraordinary purpose. The meal itself symbolizes fellowship, intimacy, and restoration, transforming a mundane act of eating into a sacred moment of communion and healing, a reminder for us of the Christ that seeks to meet with us.

It is in this deeply intimate, wondrous context that Peter is reinstated. Three times Jesus asks, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" echoing Peter's earlier threefold denial. Each affirmation by Peter is met not by condemnation but by renewed commissioning: "Feed my sheep."

I don't think it is any mistake that the reminder of the call to be involved in seeing the full abundance of God's kingdom come is linked with the reinstatement of Peter. His redemption, forgiveness and recommissioning are a strong reminder to us that whoever we are, wherever we've been, and whatever we've done—redemption is freely given in Christ. The only qualification we need to engage in Christ's work is Christ's choice, his calling of us to follow him. Like Peter, our failures and our uncertainties don't disqualify us. Instead, they become the very places where Christ's grace is encountered for ourselves. Peter's qualifications are not his perfect record or his unwavering strength—far from it. His qualification is simply that Jesus chose him. Christ's call is sufficient.

Ultimately, this passage calls us along with the disciples to mission. "Follow me," Jesus says clearly. We are invited into the ongoing story of God's abundant kingdom, called not just to fish for fish, but for people—to draw others into the same grace and forgiveness we've

received. The good news for us, seen through the lens of Peter's encounter with the risen Christ, is that that call for all of us to serve Christ in all the world, is not dependent on our strength, wisdom, or perfection. It's about obedience to the risen Christ, whose presence transforms scarcity into abundance and fear into courage. Our task is not to manage outcomes but to faithfully cast our nets, trusting that Christ will fill them according to his abundant promise.

And should we find ourselves uncertain, or lost seemingly waiting for God to lead, perhaps tempted to return to old routines and familiar comforts, be assured Christ will find you there. And even there, he will repeat again his call to follow Him clearly: to cast our nets where he directs, confident in his abundant provision, and secure in his unwavering grace. For Christ himself prepares a table for us, calling us to share in his abundant life, inviting us, with all our imperfections, to follow him faithfully into the mission of bringing hope, healing, and forgiveness to the world.

May we be a people willing to step into whatever Christ calls us to, embracing any uncertainty with faith, knowing that the risen Christ goes before us, empowering and equipping us for every step of the journey.

Amen.

Ways to Engage all Generations

When different generations are gathered together in worship there is an opportunity to build relationships and to encounter God in our conversations as we build relationships and learn from each other no matter what our ages, stage of life or faith and for all present to feel included. Adding some wondering questions to the service at an appropriate moment can help to do this.

Wondering Questions: Some wondering questions that may help to engage all generations to ponder and explore during the talk, service or during the week may include (three or so) of the following style of questions:

- I wonder what your favourite part of the story/passage is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder who your favourite character is? I wonder why that is?
- I wonder how _____ felt or I wonder how _____ felt when _____ happened?
- I wonder how you feel about _____?
- I wonder where you are in this story?
- I wonder what part of the story is about you?
- I wonder what the [tree, pearl, coin] could really be?
- I wonder why _____ said _____?
- I wonder what we can learn about God in this story?

Suggested All Age service

Interactive All-Age Worship Service: Breakfast on the Beach (John 21)

Welcome & Gathering: *{You could have some breakfast items for everyone to share in together – croissants, toast or donuts!!}*

Welcome, everyone! Today we're gathering like the disciples once did—wondering what might come next after Easter. Let's imagine we're all meeting Jesus at breakfast on the beach!

Opening Activity: (Interactive question)

When you're not sure what to do next, what's something you *enjoy* doing that helps you feel calm or hopeful? Maybe it's going for a walk, playing with your toys, drawing, or talking to someone you love. Turn to someone near you and share one thing that helps you when you're feeling unsure. (Allow a minute for people to talk in pairs or groups, encouraging children and adults alike to join in.)

Opening Prayer:

Jesus, thank you for being with us even when we're unsure about what the future holds. Help us to listen to your voice today and always. Amen.

Story Time: (Dramatic Retelling) Invite people of all ages to participate in acting out the story.

Leader: Imagine it's early morning. You've been fishing all night and caught nothing. Let's pretend to throw our nets out. Ready? One, two, three... throw! (Everyone mimics throwing nets.)

Leader: Did we catch anything? (Wait for responses.) No, nothing yet! Now someone on the shore says, "Try the other side!" Shall we try again? Ready, set, throw! (Mimic again.)

Leader: Now, pull those nets in! Oh wow, they're so heavy! Look, it's full of fish! 153 fish! Jesus is on the shore—let's wave hello to Jesus! (Everyone waves.)

Reflection Have you ever tried really hard at something and felt disappointed when it didn't work out? (Invite responses.) That's exactly how Jesus' friends felt until Jesus showed them where to fish. Jesus helped them because they listened to him. On their own they could never have done what they did when they listened to Jesus. When we follow Jesus, amazing things can happen!

Interactive Game: "Fishing Game" – Scatter paper fish around the space. Have participants "fish" for them with simple rods and magnets or nets, or hunt for them. Have the headings below written on them.

Reflective Talk: What Fish did you catch? (Invite some to read their fish.) Use each one to offer a short reflection. They can be done in any order. You could use all of these or choose those most pertinent to your congregation.

Scatter paper fish around the space—under chairs, taped to walls, or placed in a "net." Each fish has one of the following words or phrases written on it. As each is found, someone reads the word aloud and the leader shares the short reflection. These can be picked in any order.



"I'm Going Fishing"

Reflection:

Sometimes when we feel uncertain or don't know what to do next, we go back to what we know. Peter went fishing—it was familiar. But Jesus met him right there. Jesus meets *us* in our everyday routines, even when we're unsure.



"Empty Nets"

Reflection:

The disciples fished all night and caught nothing. We all have times when our efforts feel empty, like nothing's working. But Jesus shows up, and when we listen to him, things can change in amazing ways.



"Abundance"

Reflection:

153 fish! That's a lot! Jesus doesn't just give *enough*—he gives in *abundance*. It's a sign of God's generous love. When Jesus is near, there is more than enough for everyone.



"Try the Other Side"

Reflection:

Jesus told them to try the other side of the boat. It seemed simple, but it changed everything. Sometimes Jesus invites us to look at things differently—to try again, trust again, hope again.



"Come and Eat"

Reflection:

Jesus made breakfast. The Risen Lord didn't start with big speeches—he started with a meal. He still invites us today to rest, to eat, and to know we are loved and welcome.



"Do You Love Me?"

Reflection:

Jesus asked Peter this three times. It wasn't to make him feel bad—it was to show him that love was still possible, still real, even after his mistakes. Jesus forgives, restores, and calls us again.



"Follow Me"

Reflection:

These were the first words Jesus said to Peter when they first met. And here, after breakfast, Jesus says them again. It's a call for *all of us*—no matter who we are, no matter where we've been.



"Fishers of People"

Reflection:

In this fishing encounter Jesus reminds the disciples—and us—that we are called to share his love. To 'fish for people' means inviting others into God's love through our words, actions, and lives.



"Jesus Provides"

Reflection:

From the full nets to the cooked breakfast, Jesus provides what we need—food, forgiveness, direction, and friendship. We don't have to have it all figured out. We just need to trust him.

Interactive Prayer Activity: "Fish Prayer"

Provide paper fish. Invite people to write or draw prayers thanking Jesus for forgiveness and his friendship. Stick the prayers onto a large net at the front of the worship area.

Closing Prayer, Blessing and Sending Out

As you go today, remember Jesus is always with you—guiding you, loving you, and helping you do wonderful things in his name. Let's go out together, ready to fish for people by sharing God's love! Thank you, Jesus, for forgiving us, loving us, and calling us to be your friends. Help us share your love with others every day.

All: Amen!

Suggested formal intercessions

Let us pray to the risen Christ, who meets us in our ordinary lives, who provides in abundance, and who calls us to follow.

For the Church of Christ across the world:

Risen Lord,

renew your Church in every place with the hope of Easter.

Strengthen all who serve in ministry, lay and ordained.

Make us fishers of people—bold in proclaiming your love,

gentle in offering your mercy,

and joyful in sharing the feast you set before us.

May your Church be a place of restoration, forgiveness, and calling.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

For the world and its peoples:

Lord Jesus,

we pray for the world you love so deeply.

Where there is violence, bring peace.

Where there is hunger, bring food in abundance.

Where there is despair, bring your presence and hope.

Guide all nations in the way of justice and reconciliation,

and bless those who work to bring aid and healing in difficult places.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

For those in authority and government:

God of wisdom,

give insight, compassion, and integrity to all who hold public office.

Help them to serve not for gain, but for the good of all.

Where policies fall short of justice, may they be reformed.

Where leaders falter, may they be supported or corrected.

Strengthen all who work for good governance and peace.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

For the sick and those in any kind of need:

Compassionate Christ,

you know what it means to sit by a fire and care for the weary.

Draw near to those who are ill in body, mind, or spirit.

Be with those who grieve, those who are lonely, and those who fear the future.

We name now in silence those on our hearts today...

(Pause for silence)

Surround them with your love, and bring healing, comfort, and peace.

Lord, in your mercy

Hear our prayer.

For ourselves and our discipleship:
Lord of the shore and the table,
you call us to follow you.
In our uncertainty, give us courage.
In our failures, remind us of your grace.
Make us faithful in our witness, generous in our love,
and attentive to your voice in the everyday moments of life.
Help us to cast our nets with hope, and serve with joy.

Lord, in your mercy
Hear our prayer.

Gathering all our prayers together, we say:
Merciful Father,
accept these prayers for the sake of your Son,
our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

Suggested hymns/songs

Traditional Hymns

1. "Will You Come and Follow Me"
2. "I Heard the Voice of Jesus Say"
3. "Come, Ye Faithful, Raise the Strain"
4. "Jesus, Stand Among Us"
5. "Christ is Made the Sure Foundation"
6. "O Jesus, I Have Promised"
7. "The Church's One Foundation"
8. "Let Us Talents and Tongues Employ"
9. "Alleluia, Sing to Jesus"
10. "I the lord of Sea and Sky"

Contemporary Worship Songs

1. "Build My Life" – Pat Barrett
2. "Way Maker" – Sinach
3. "Living Hope" – Phil Wickham
4. "10,000 Reasons (Bless the Lord)" – Matt Redman
5. "You Say" – Lauren Daigle
6. "Come As You Are" – Crowder
7. "Goodness of God" – Bethel Music
8. "Resurrecting" – Elevation Worship
9. "Build your Kingdom here" Rend Collective

Child-Friendly Songs (Engaging & Easy to Learn)

"I'm Gonna Clap My Hands"
"My Lighthouse" – Rend Collective.
"God's Love is Big" – Vineyard Kids

Activities to accompany the service

If you are looking for resources to accompany the service for engaging younger children, then there are lots of online resources. The following free to access/download resources may be useful starting points:

- <https://flamecreativekids.blogspot.com/>
- <https://www.pinterest.co.uk/MessyChurchBRF/>
- <https://www.faithinkids.org/>
- [reflectionary.org](https://www.reflectionary.org/) – lectionary-based resources
- [engageworship](https://www.engageworship.org/) – in particular 'Area 52' for lectionary-based material
- <https://www.bdeducation.org.uk/product-category/primary-age-5-11/>
(weekly@lectionary resource)