

John 21.1-19; Rev 5.11-14; Acts 9:1-6.

3rd Sunday of Easter

10th April 2016, 8 & 10 a.m. @ St. Andrew's, Totteridge

May I speak in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; Amen.

I've read recently an account of what it's like to stand at the edge of the Sea of Galilee, or the Sea of Tiberias as it is described in John. As some of you know, I've never been to the Holy Lands. The writer describes how it can hardly have changed since the time of Christ – it's still there, still fed by underground springs and the Jordan River, still surrounded by the same hillsides as ever it was.

And now as then it was, and is, a turbulent region - the borders of Syria and Jordan are very close - apparently it retains a hauntingly beautiful, peaceful ambience. The writer describes an ambience that easily evokes the depth of love that a man can show in his forgiveness, his forgiveness of one who has denied even knowing him. On this peaceful beach, all things are made new by the risen Lord.

So I've never been to visit and as I was preparing for this sermon I began to wonder why? Why have I never felt a strong need to visit the places that Christ would have walked, when the fact that he did so gives me my principle understanding for the meaning of life? On reflection, I suspect it's because I don't think he's particularly there - any more than he is anywhere else – I think of him as everywhere, in everyone who has life. His resurrection enabled him to leave us with the Holy Spirit, the advocate, who inspires wherever and whenever it will.

As it did with Peter and with Paul - the Spirit enables recognition. Simon Peter by the same Sea of Galilee, who immediately dropped everything to answer the first call to follow (Mt.4:20, Mk.1.18), and Paul, who quite literally drops off his horse at the overwhelming nature of his call. They both have a personal encounter with the risen Lord. They are both humbled; Peter by his shameful three-fold denial; Paul, in all his self-righteous self-assurance reduced to a stumbling blindness, needing to be led by those so recently pursued.

But notice how he answered that question from the invisible speaker, '[Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me](#)' with the paradoxical response '[Lord](#)' even before he knows who it is that asks (Acts 9.5). It is of course possible that Paul responded to a dramatic show of force by assuming that a more impressive agency than the dead prophet of an annoying sect was at work. But that doesn't account for his immediate obedience – he both knows and doesn't know that the power that overcomes him will be the driving power that commands him for the rest of his life, even though he doesn't yet have a relationship with it (Bridget Nichols).

So three times The Acts of the Apostles recounts the story of the conversion of Saul into Paul. The first time as we've heard today, and twice more (chs 22 & 26) in Paul's own first-person testimony. It's as though Luke, the author of Acts, wants to emphasize that, even though there's no indication that Paul ever met Jesus, he can still legitimately claim apostolic status with the others by virtue of the profundity of his world-shaking call.

Peter features large in our reading from John. He had led the others to return to their boats, to their former lives as fishermen. Leading still, it is he who initiates the night's endeavour; he who hearing from the beloved disciple that this is the Lord, leaps out of the boat to go to Jesus; he who in obedience leaps back in to drag the net ashore.

And then it is he who has to face his master's threefold probing questions, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" and at once he is taken back to their very first meeting and his renaming as Peter (Jn.1:42). It is he who receives the ultimate direct commission – 'follow me' – one that is addressed to all who would walk in his name.

Jesus tells Paul that there will be a time when someone else will lead him where he doesn't want to go – something we must all come to terms with at stages of our lives, and especially as age and infirmity encroach. I do want to go the Holy Lands – I think I must one day – but if I'm honest, I suppose I don't look forward to it. It may be that I'm afraid – afraid of this land that gave Him nowhere to lay his head – afraid that I won't be able to find Him there.

But then I really should know better, shouldn't I, because Jesus is everywhere, especially in places of turbulence, amidst the poor, the oppressed, the sick and the lame. And I should remember, shouldn't I, that no matter how unworthy we may feel, wherever there is anyone turning towards Him, feeding His lambs, tending His sheep, following in His ultimately compassionate footsteps, trying in some way to make a difference - He will meet us half-way and walk with us wherever we go. *Amen.*

John 21.1-19 Jesus Appears to Seven Disciples

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³Simon Peter said to them, 'I am going fishing.' They said to him, 'We will go with you.' They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵ Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' ⁶ He said to them, 'Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.' So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. ⁷ That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!' When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the lake. ⁸ But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off.

⁹ When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' ¹¹ So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, 'Come and have breakfast.' Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, 'Who are you?' because they knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came and

took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now **the third time** that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Jesus and Peter

15 **When they had finished breakfast,** Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, '**Feed my lambs.**' ¹⁶A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, '**Tend my sheep.**' ¹⁷He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, 'Do you love me?' And he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, '**Feed my sheep.**' ¹⁸Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.' ¹⁹(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, '**Follow me.**'

Acts 9:1-6

The Conversion of Saul

Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest ²and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem. ³Now as he was going along and approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?' ⁵He asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' The reply came, '**I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting.**' ⁶**But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do.'**

Rev 5.11-14

11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹²singing with full voice, '**Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!**' ¹³Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, '**To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!**' ¹⁴And the four living creatures said, 'Amen!' And the elders fell down and worshipped.

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