

Sermon at the Cathedral Eucharist

The Third Sunday of Easter

1<sup>st</sup> May 2022

One of the things that I love about my job as workplace and community chaplain is that it is very ordinary. That might be a bit hard to believe from someone stood in a pulpit in a Cathedral dressed like this, but this is actually a bit of a side hustle for me. Most of my time is spent talking with people as they work in shops, cafes, offices, a mail sorting centre and at Edinburgh airport. It's an absolute privilege to be with people in some of the most ordinary, everyday and routine moments of their lives. They are serving customers, doing the stock take, inputting data, sorting mail, answering the phone, tidying up, assisting people through airport check-in and security and moving baggage. And as I stop by, they chat through some of the very ordinary things of life; relationships, health worries, employment concerns, holidays, births, deaths, marriages, divorces, holidays, what's on the tv and what they are doing in their time off. It is all very ordinary. And I am there to support people in their spirituality and faith in that very ordinary. Not for me the task of being the religious person at the special times and rituals in life; funerals, weddings, baptisms, Christmas, Easter, and weekly worship. I am simply there to witness to the divine in the ordinary.

So, it's very lovely and apposite today, courtesy of the lectionary, to be able to explore with you, a story from the Bible (John 21.1-19) about people meeting Jesus, meeting the divine, as they go about the tasks of their particular jobs in ordinary life. Jesus' death has happened, His resurrection appearances have been confirmed, days have perhaps passed into weeks and the disciples are all at a bit of a loss for what to do next. They have to get away from the heavy atmosphere of a locked room out into the fresh air of real life and just get on. Some of them have gone back to the place they had lived in while Jesus was alive and, stuck for an idea of what to do next, Peter decides to do what he used to do and go fishing. You can almost hear his tone of voice; "well that's me away to my boat". "Aye" say some of his friends "I'll be coming with you pal".

Of course, they spend all night fishing but don't catch anything. To do anything other would ruin the flow of the story. They are glum, waiting for something to happen without knowing what, still out of sorts with each other, not feeling particularly safe and hugely disappointed that there has been no revolution. And now they can't even catch any fish. Career fishermen, been at it since Noah was a lad, and they can't even get that right. Can't go forward and now they can't go back either.

Into this most ordinary and everyday moment of life steps Jesus. Not, this time, in the shadows of evening falling but rather as the day has just broken. Not, this time, clearly showing His physical body but rather shouting from the distant shore. The disciples take a while to recognise Him and even when they do all of them, except Peter, respond pretty ambiguously. There is no real rush to get to Him, they simply carry on hauling the fish they have now caught to shore, and they don't take the opportunity to speak frankly with him, instead they chatter away basing the conversation on instinct and intuition. Something is

being revealed as the sun rises in the sky, but it is hard to catch. Hard to know what it really is.

And in this context Jesus does three things. Firstly, He suggests a solution to the most immediate problem and danger. They have caught no fish all night. This could have a serious detrimental effect on their already wobbly self-esteem and, if it continues, on their livelihoods. On previous occasions, as we heard last week, Jesus first words to a bunch of His disciples are "peace be with you". This, it seems to me, is the concrete way of acting out those words. First things first, says Jesus, be at peace because without a sense of peace, real peace, a stopping of all that is frantic and hostile, there isn't space or room to take the next steps. And note Jesus doesn't solve the problem for them, they still have to choose to follow His shouted advice. Secondly, Jesus provides for their basic needs. He has brought with Him stuff to build a fire and fish and bread for breakfast. By the time they are ashore the fire is hot and the fish is cooking. Jesus invites them to add to the food and to eat with Him. Again, note that He doesn't do it all for them. Thirdly, He takes them back to the core of what He was all about, what the last few years of their lived experience have been about and asks them to recommit to that. Love for Him – absolutely. And then also care for others. And right there, in the metaphoric language He uses is a stark acknowledgement that this is the same, but different. They were fishermen once asked to fish no longer for fish but for people, now the familiar is gone, and they are fishermen asked to care for sheep.

This description fits a lot with my experience of how God, or the divine, appears in the most ordinary and everyday moments of life. There's a feeling, a sense that something is being revealed but it's really hard to catch or describe. There are moments of real peace, whatever that means for the person involved. Peace offered, peace accepted, peace hard won, peace felt, peace just simply present in the moment, whatever else is being said or done. There are relationships which provide the simply and basic needs of life – food, housing, love, friendship and security. And then there is that gentle invitation to commit, recommit, and recommit over and over again to loving God and caring for others even though the next steps on the journey will be very different from the ones we have taken before. Whether there has been a trauma like the one the disciples had experienced or not, the divine appears and life is reset.

I cannot finish without acknowledging the parallels between where the disciples and where we are. We too have been through a trauma in history, and even before that one fully finished, another one started up. We are coming to the end, hopefully, of the covid pandemic, while at the same time trying to also live with the new normal of the horrific experiences of the people of Ukraine. Like the disciples we are, I think, a bit lost as to what to do next, we are disorientated, unsettled, not quite knowing what happens next. We are back in familiar territory, doing familiar things, but somehow they are all slightly different. It's hard, so hard. And yet, in the most ordinary of moments God shows up, bringing the peace that creates room for us to take the next step. Shows up in the sharing of food, shelter, warmth, love, care and friendship. Shows up nudging and inspiring us to lives of commitment to love; trust in God's overwhelming love for us, and dedication in our love for others. Shows up in that feeling, that sense that something is being revealed that is

hard to catch or to describe. And so the resurrected Christ walks just ahead of us and we catch a glimpse of His shadow on the road. The story goes on.

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