

John 21:1-14 CC 9am 18th Aug 2013

These verses are in one sense very easy to understand. Here we read the account of Jesus, after his resurrection, appearing to his disciples on the beach by the Sea of Galilee. We see how he directed the tired fishermen to cast their net one more time. On doing so they hauled in a huge catch of fish. The catch caused John to realise it was Jesus standing on the beach in the early morning light. Peter, on realising that, wrapped his coat round him, jumped out of the boat and made his way to shore while the rest brought the boats and fish. On the beach they found Jesus with a fire on which there were fish and bread. He invited them to eat with him.

As I say it is easy to understand at least on this surface level.

However, when we start asking questions of Jesus' motives for this appearance and what he asked the disciples to do and when we wonder why John put this in his gospel and what he expected the original readers to gain from it then we are into more difficult territory.

So many ideas have come forward as links are made back to the original call of Peter and the big catch there and to the feeding of the 5000. Much ink has been spilt on the 153 fish mentioned here and I have even heard it suggested that it endorses men's breakfasts but shows we should have kedgeree!

Over the next few minutes I am going to try and draw some threads out of this and see what it might have meant for the original readers and what it might say to us but I do so acknowledging that all I can do is offer suggestions.

The passage begins with the word "afterwards". The context is that Jesus has been crucified but has risen and has appeared a couple of times already to his disciples in the upper room. On the first occasion he gave them the commission "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" (John 20:21). The passage ends with v14 "This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead." So clearly the first readers and we are meant to see that this is about the resurrected Jesus. John wrote his book with the clear purpose as stated in 20:31, "But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." The book was written for Jews spread round the middle east to show them who Jesus was. This passage, a third resurrection appearance, is important in that. It takes us away from Jerusalem, away from the days immediately after his death and puts us in a very ordinary situation. There Jesus appeared and was seen and recognised by his disciples even though, as we see in v12, they could scarcely believe it was Jesus. Jesus rose from the dead that was the fact that John wanted his readers and us to see from this passage.

However there are a number of other nuances here so let me suggest some but in everything keeping Jesus at the centre because these events are about him.

1. Jesus appeared v1-4

Here were these seven Apostles back in Galilee and they had gone night fishing with no success. Then v4, "Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realise that it was Jesus."

Now we can spend time working out whether they were right or wrong to go fishing and why they didn't recognise Jesus. But ultimately the point is that here were these men in one sense back at their point of origin, when suddenly there was Jesus risen from the dead standing on the beach. He wasn't dead, he was alive! The one who had called them to follow him was still with them and still their Master. Jesus appeared and one thing I suggest that meant was that the mission had not ended.

Last October I sat with a few hundred other hardy souls as my football team ran out onto the pitch. I counted the players there were only 10! We got beat 7-0. That day all there were convinced that the club had died. That was it and for a month or more no matches were played. But eventually, on a different ground, with a different manager and different players, we did play again. I know I saw it – and still bear the psychological scars! But now we have begun a new season and the mission goes on!

Jesus died but he rose again and his presence with the disciples that day and the record for the early readers and for us is the reminder that his death was not the end and that his mission to build the kingdom of God continues with a living Lord at the head.

In this sense the appearance of Jesus may well have been a reminder to Peter and the others that their task was fishing for men not cod, carp or whatever! Certainly the events of that early morning have echoes of Luke 5 and the call of Peter.

However the clear point is that Jesus was alive and so the mission continued.

2. Jesus acted v5-8

Jesus didn't just stand there on the beach watching he acted or perhaps better he spoke and his action benefitted the disciples.

V5 he called out asking if they'd caught anything and the answer was negative. He then told them to throw the nets out on the right side of the boat and suddenly they had a huge catch. That caused John, v7, to say to Peter it was Jesus standing on the beach, which led to Peter jumping out of the boat, even as he had got out of the boat to walk to Jesus on the water, leaving his friends to drag in the catch.

Again much has been written about what it means and certainly it has echoes of the day Jesus called Peter to follow him and perhaps there is a sense of taking Peter back to where it all started to remind him of that call. Next week as we look at the rest of the chapter we shall see how Jesus does

re-instate Peter as an Apostle and so perhaps this is a symbolic part of doing that and a way of exorcising some of the demons in Peter as he remembered his denial of Jesus. I'm not sure. However what we do see here is the power of Jesus. The resurrected Jesus was powerful and mighty through his word and its result was in sharp contrast to the fruitless activity of the Apostles! They had worked all night with nothing to show for it. Along came Jesus and working with him suddenly the situation is very different.

“Apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5).

I was sitting at my desk on Tuesday morning and had typed possibly the first 100 words of this sermon when... nothing. There was nothing on my screen. The power had gone. Oh dear! Well not to worry let me make a cup of coffee – no power. Check emails no power. Almost everything I thought of required electricity! In the end I got out a bit of paper and a pencil and wrote until the phone went. It was my son wondering why he couldn't Skype me- no power. It made me realise again how much we depend upon electricity. Without power we can do nothing - how much more so in the spiritual realm. Jesus is building his kingdom, the place where he rules through his word and spirit. He has called us humans to share the work with him but without his power we can do nothing. This was a vivid example to these disciples. Called to fish for men if they and we would see people come to faith it will be as we depend upon the power of God.

As we led up to DISCOVER, our mission, I spoke about our contact people about praying for them, talking with them and inviting them to things. I hope we are still doing that and I hope especially that we are being faithful in praying for them. The mission of Jesus continues because he is alive but that mission will only be fruitful through his power.

Peter and the others saw his power and their inability. Later on in the temple courts when a beggar approached Peter and John and asked for money Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”(Acts 3:6) I have nothing, I can do nothing, but in Jesus' name all things are possible.

Let's be reminded that the mission of Jesus continues but that it is only effective in his power. So let us be in prayer in our homes, our prayer meetings, in church and elsewhere for that mission and for those who are yet to come to faith.

Jesus appeared, Jesus acted – we are keeping the focus I hope on Jesus and

3. Jesus fed v9-14

When they got to shore they found Jesus was already cooking breakfast with some fish and some bread. He asked them for some fish and they brought some out of the 153 they had caught. Then Jesus fed them.

Now you would not believe how many theories there are about the 153 fish, or about why Jesus asked them to bring some of the catch.

But again the main point is that this was Jesus they were with. Jesus was talking, cooking and feeding them. He was alive. He was real. He was not a figment of their imagination.

Now the action of Jesus here may have no more symbolism than the fact that he knew they had been out all night and so would be hungry. If it is simply that it speaks of his care for his followers even after his death and resurrection.

Some have suggested that there is the symbolism in the feeding in the light of his words in John 6:35 "I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty". The symbolism is seen in the feeding with bread of those who would go on to feed others with the word of God.

Certainly from God's word elsewhere we see the importance of allowing Jesus to feed us that we might grow as his followers and that we might be used to feed others. If we are involved in any area of work with our children or young people we need to ensure that we are being fed so that we can pass on God's word to others.

I do realise that the idea some pregnant women have that they are "eating for two" is not right but certainly in the latter stages of pregnancy I understand women can take on more calories. But it does give us a bit of a picture that as Christians and especially as we grow we should not simply be feeding on God's word for our own sake but so that we can help feed others.

We need to be feeding on the living bread but also passing that food on to others.

Here we have a resurrection appearance of Jesus witnessed by his disciples and passed on by John so that the first readers might believe that Jesus is God and by believing have life. The same is there for us as well. Here is evidence that Jesus rose, evidence that he is God, evidence that we should believe in him and follow him.

But within that we see also that as the risen Lord his mission continues and it continues in his power but using not just these chosen Apostles but us in our day as we grow in Jesus and pass his word and gospel onto others.