

John 21:15-19

CC 9am 25<sup>th</sup> Aug 2013

Well by now all the exam results have come out and youngsters are working out what to do with what they have got.

For some it will be plain sailing they needed 3 A's at A level or 9 at GCSE and got them and away they go. For other perhaps they haven't got what they wanted and so they have to work out what next. I can empathise with them because I have failed quite a few exams down the years and that has left me wondering what next.

I remember being on holiday with friends in Wales and ringing my parents and finding out I hadn't got what I needed to do a four year degree course prior to teaching. To cut a long story short I had three goes at doing four years and each time failed. So in the end I only did three years at the teacher training college and left with a real sense of sadness that I had failed and wasn't able to stay on for that fourth year with friends who were.

I just wonder whether Peter as he made his way with some of the other disciples up from Jerusalem to Galilee after the death of Jesus didn't have similar feelings, feelings of failure, of not having as it were passed the test, of having let Jesus down, of being viewed by the other disciples as a failure. Yes Jesus had risen from the dead but where did it all leave Peter in the eyes of Jesus and of his fellow disciples?

It strikes me that this is the context of John 21.

Peter with the other disciples had returned to Galilee. But Peter in a sense was at a crossroads. Clearly at the forefront of his thinking was his failure in the courtyard outside the High Priest's palace and the way he had three times denied Jesus. Such a thing must have weighed heavy. But with that failure must have been the uncertainty of the future. How did Jesus view him and how did the other disciples view him?

Now as we read John 21:15 they are eating with Jesus and perhaps these questions were for Peter and maybe the others the elephant in the room.

Have you ever been in the position of managing people and having someone in the team who let's the team down? If so I wonder how you dealt with it.

I think the way Jesus dealt with Peter there on the beach shows us much about Jesus and about how he relates to his followers.

There was no balling Peter out. There was no 'let's go over what happened' and a dredging up of past mistakes. Instead there was a question, a command both repeated three times and a call.

### **1. The question v15**

"Simon son of John, do you truly love me more than these?"

Here it would seem Jesus makes love the test. He didn't ask do you believe or do you have faith but simply do you love me? For Peter that was much easier because here was a man who knew his heart. His response was "yes". What the 'more than these' refers to is uncertain but probably referred to the other disciples. Peter had been the one who had said he would lay down his life for Jesus and then failed even to acknowledge he knew him. Was he going to repeat the proud boast now?

Even though he said yes it was not a boast because it was followed by "you know that I love you". It was the statement of a fact that Jesus was aware of.

Three times Jesus asked Peter the question and by the end Peter was getting exasperated, v17 "Peter was hurt" but of course the three questions must reflect the three times Peter denied Jesus and were part of exorcising the demons.

It was as if Jesus was saying to Peter, "look I know what you have done, what happened there in the courtyard. I want us to move on past that and continue the mission I came to undertake. I'm ready to wipe the sheet clean, forgive and pardon but I need to hear from your own lips that you love me. Failures I can understand and in a sense expect from my disciples but I need to know you love me with a sincere heart."

Here was the central part of Jesus relationship with Peter and through him with all who follow him, the question do we love him?"

Bishop J.C.Ryle in his book on John writes this: "Let us carefully note that to love Christ is one of the simplest tests of a true Christian. He may not feel sure that he is converted, or that he repents or believes aright. But if he is real and sincere he will be able to say that he loves Christ."

In restoring Peter this it would seem was Jesus' key concern. Where was Peter's heart?

Ultimately if Peter is to be restored as an Apostle then Jesus needed to know of Peter's love.

Another writer says "this is the basic qualification for Christian service. Other qualities may be desirable but love is indispensable."

Friends all of us who are Christians will be very aware of times when we have let Jesus down. They may be recent or well in the past. They may be small, perhaps a failure to speak for him when given the opportunity, or an area of sin in our lives that we see as more significant. Whatever we have all failed him and so this passage is relevant for all of us.

Jesus wanted Peter to be restored he came to seek him out in Galilee. In Mark's gospel Jesus' message to the women at his resurrection was, "go, tell his disciples and Peter, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'" (Mark 16:7)

Jesus wanted Peter restored as he wants each of us restored if we have failed him in any way and the question he asks is "do you love me?"

It is a good question for all of us to think about.

The question is not do you do good things, do you help people, serve on Church Council or whatever but do you love me?

The question is not do you enjoy worship and attend prayer meetings but do you love me?

The question is not do you now your Bible and teach it to others but do you love me?

Friends Jesus asks us this morning a question of our heart and it is the key question. I wonder how you are answering that in your mind as you listen to this either here in Christ Church or on the download?

You see without this love we really are nothing, just “resounding gongs and clanging cymbals” (1 Cor 13:1)

All Christian life and ministry stems out of this.

It was in response to Peter’s answer to this question that we see

## **2. The commission v15**

“feed my lambs”.

Again Jesus says it three times and using slightly different words but the meaning is the same. What we have here is firstly a public restoration of Peter in front of the other disciples and a commissioning of him, not to be Bishop of Rome, but to do the essential task of a Christian minister, and that is to take the word of God and use it to build and strengthen the people of God.

To do that it is essential that he loves the Lord Jesus Christ. That will be his motivation in the years of ministry that lay ahead.

Being sure of his heart Jesus publicly restores Peter as one of the Apostles with this task of ‘feeding Jesus’ sheep’.

The restoration of Peter publicly was important.

A few weeks ago we were playing cricket and a guy dropped a catch of my bowling. Now he didn’t mean to do it and I have dropped catches. But for a moment the devil in me thought crumbs he is not up to much he has let the team down and more he has let me down. Perhaps he shouldn’t be in the team.

It would have been easy for the other disciples to have looked at Peter and thought crumbs after all his talk who is it that denies Jesus – Peter! He has let the team down and he has let Jesus down.

Shouldn’t be in the team.

As I said all of us get things wrong in the Christian life and the same in cricket so just after the catch went down I shouted over, “come on head up don’t worry about it”. The guy was part of the team and important in the team.

Here were the disciples thinking is Peter still in the team? Does Jesus still want him? The answer is that of course Jesus wanted him and this blip didn't stop him being involved as a Christian disciple or as a Christian leader.

We all get things wrong. We all let Jesus down and we all let the side, the Christian church, down. But here Jesus shows there is forgiveness and there can be restoration. Yes repentance needs to be shown but our failure does not mean Jesus rejects us so neither should other Christians and our failure does not mean Jesus cannot use us in his service and other Christians should have the same attitude.

Jesus restored Peter in these words and he gave him this task to teach the word of God.

If I could again quote from Bishop Ryle "The true qualification for the ministerial office, Peter must learn, was not high profession of more courage and zeal than others not loud talk, or over readiness to fight; but loving, patient usefulness to the souls of others and diligent care for the sheep of Christ's flock." (P502)

Is there any thing better any of us can do than help people to know and grow in Jesus?

In case you are in any doubt Jesus here seems to suggest that there isn't.

Some time back when we did Lifeshapes we spoke about the square and the fact that all of us are sheep, following and learning from Jesus but all of us also are shepherds caring for and teaching others. Those others may be youngsters in our children or youth work or they may be other adults who are just coming to faith or new in the faith. I have said before I remember not long after I came to faith a guy offering to do some work on the Christian faith with me and I benefitted a lot from that. So who are we helping in this way?

The question, the commission and finally

### **3. The call v19**

"The he said to him, "follow me"". In one sense that was what Peter had been doing and yet in another with his boasting of laying down his life for Jesus he had not because he was concerned for himself and his own identity. Jesus through all this, the catch of fish, the questions on the beach, the commission has been reminding Peter it is about Jesus. It is about following him and, more importantly, relying on Jesus to set the agenda and provide the resources. As we saw last week Jesus was reminding Peter that "Apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

The command is to follow me. To stay with Jesus and trust in his power and strength for what lay ahead.

The call is the same for all of us. We fail Jesus and he restores us and says follow me. That is we need to continually be learning from Jesus and understanding his will for our lives. We need to be resting

in his power and his strength to face the battles that are in front of us and to fulfil the tasks of ministry he calls us to in our work place and in our church.

Peter had failed Jesus and let down the team but here we see that this did not rule him out.

As I said at the beginning three times I failed to qualify to do four years at college and left after three years with a bit of a bitter taste in my mouth. Within 6 months I had come to faith and since have been called by Jesus to feed his lambs. Failure didn't rule me out and my failures since haven't and they don't rule you out either.

Here Jesus asked Peter the key question as to where his heart was and on the basis of that he restored him as an apostle, and called him to continue as a disciple.

Friends whatever is there in our past, what ever failures there have been, Jesus just wants to know do you love him. If the answer is yes then in love he will restore and renew you as his follower and use you in his service.