

Easter 3 – 10am St Peter's & 8am St Paul's

Acts 9

9 Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest ² and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. ³ As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"

⁵ "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.

"I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. ⁶ "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."

⁷ The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. ⁸ Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. ⁹ For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything.

¹⁰ In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, "Ananias!"

"Yes, Lord," he answered.

¹¹ The Lord told him, "Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying. ¹² In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and place his hands on him to restore his sight."

¹³ "Lord," Ananias answered, "I have heard many reports about this man and all the harm he has done to your holy people in Jerusalem. ¹⁴ And he has come here with authority from the chief priests to arrest all who call on your name."

¹⁵ But the Lord said to Ananias, "Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name."

¹⁷ Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ Immediately, something like scales fell from Saul's eyes, and he could see again. He got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

John 21

21 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: ² Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. ³ "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

⁴ Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵ He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

"No," they answered.

⁶ He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

⁷ Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. ⁸ The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. ⁹ When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." ¹¹ So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. ¹³ Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴ This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵ When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

¹⁶ Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

¹⁷ The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"

Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

It seemed an age since that night when He washed our feet
So much had happened in between

Judas, dipped his bread then disappeared into the night
None of us saw that one coming

We'd discussed it since
He was always a little too keen on holding the purse
It would seem The Lord wasn't entirely his god after all

Then there was my finest hour – what a total disgrace
As with one denial after another,
His predictions came home to roost

And as the rooster crowed - as if to mock me
I realised how quick I am always ready to speak
And how slow to engage brain first!

And then began the appearances
Outside the tomb, in the upper room and on the road
So far though, He'd uttered not one word to me

Had He fallen out with me?
Having seen how badly I let Him down
Had He lost faith in me?

Everything I knew about Him screamed
“no - surely not”
This is the One who taught us about love and forgiveness
He just wouldn't turn me away
He wouldn't just dismiss me like that – would He?

The doubts weighed heavy on my mind
since He'd gone, everything seemed so futile
So meaningless

He'd appeared to some – but not even a glance toward me

It was all too much
There was only one thing to do
One thing I could do,
The only thing I was any good at
“I'm going fishing”

I felt a sense of shame as I pushed the boat out
It was like I was betraying Him once again
Abandoning His mission to mankind

But He wasn't there, and I felt so alone – so inadequate

Some of the others decided to join me
That was reassuring

Maybe they were feeling the same way?
Or were they just feeling sorry for me?
A little show of solidarity perhaps?

So we went to fish
Huh! All night and not one single fish
Not even a kipper in the net
What a waste of time that was!

It seemed even the one thing I thought I knew
Had abandoned me

So we headed for shore
Cold, damp and tired

As we drew closer we saw Him
One man, alone on the beach
There seemed to be a fire burning near Him

“Friends” he shouted

we looked at one another
“Friends”? do we know this guy?

His voice sounded vaguely familiar
“Have you caught no fish?”

who is this guy? Is He poking fun at us?
Surely He can see
from the way the boat sat high in the water
that we had no fish

“Throw your net on the right side of the boat”
He said.
“then you will find some.”

Now I should perhaps explain
That it’s not easy to see fish from the boat
The sun reflects off the water into your eyes

And often we’d have a spotter standing on the shore
Who could see exactly where the fish were
and guide us to where to put out the net

so was this man a fisherman too?

It was at that moment I had one of those flashbacks
To the day we first met Him
And He directed us to a massive haul of fish
Then said, “Follow me, I will make you fishers of men!”

No – surely not? Is it? Could it be?
Without hesitation I grabbed the net and cast it out again
Impetuous? Me? Well, yes, I admit it

almost instantly,
we were nearly capsized by the weight of fish!

John was certainly convinced that very moment
“It’s the Lord!” he screamed

I don’t remember quite what happened next
All I know is that I was in the water,
half wading, half swimming
frantically splashing and crashing my way to the shore

and yes – it was Him!
though not one of us dared say it

Now I have to admit, there was a moment there
I was trembling as I stepped onto the shore
And it wasn’t because of the cold water

I was well used to that

Just for a moment our eyes briefly met
And I had to look away

He sent me back to the boat for some fish
And He put them onto the fire

Then He sat us down in a circle
Just as He did that night
and He broke bread and passed it around
Just as He did that night

Very little was said over breakfast
We were all totally convinced it was Him
But no one dared ask Him

After we'd eaten, He stood up
and beckoned me to follow Him
we walked along the shore together

"this is it" I thought
"this is where I get an earful for abandoning Him"

after what seemed an eternity - He spoke
"Simon son of John"

this cut to the bone,
His pet name for me was always *Peter the Rock*

Now here He was, addressing me formerly
Like a judge before passing sentence!

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

What a strange question
I left Him there, at the hands of His executioners
I denied ever knowing Him
And here He is, asking if I love Him

It was as if I'd never offended Him
It was as if He knew, that when the chips were down
I'd blow it

And what did He mean "more than these?"
Was He referring to the other disciples?
A little dig perhaps at the night I said I'd never betray Him?
Whilst another was going out into the night?

Or was He thinking more about the boat and the nets?
Does He want me to give it all up again?
Everything I know, everything I value, everything I love?

Either way – my answer was simple and instant

“Yes, Lord,” I said, “you know that I love you.”
(I desperately wanted to explain my actions that night
but I just knew He’d ask - if He really wanted to know)

He said to me, “Feed my lambs.”

Memories came flooding back
“I am the good shepherd” He told us
“My sheep know my voice and they follow me”

“Feed my Lambs”

we’re all His sheep
not just the twelve, but every member of the human race
does He want me to feed the world?

I was still trying to work out what He meant
when He stopped, turned to face me
and asked again

“Simon son of John, do you *love* me?”

Still with the formal address, now with those piercing eyes
What is He doing? Why does He need to ask again?

“Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

“Take care of my sheep.”

So not only feed them, take care of them
And not just the lambs
Not just the tiny, helpless little ones
But all of them, young and old

We walked on for some time in silence
Giving me a chance to gather my thoughts

Everything He’d taught us
was about taking care of one another
and He told us He is the Great Shepherd
and we His sheep

so is this a new commandment?
or simply a reiteration of the old one?
Or maybe one special instruction for me, personally?

Was I – despite my miserable failure
still the chosen one?
Still to be the rock?
the foundation of His church?

He stopped again – this time He looked deep into my soul
“Simon son of John, do you love me?”

now this really was beginning to hurt
not once had He mentioned that night,
but surely this was what it was all about

three times I betrayed Him,
three times He asks this question

or - is this His way of forgiving me?

I was beginning to wish He'd just come right out with it
“Listen to me you miserable wretch,
you let me down big time
and if you want to be even a disciple, let alone the leader
you've got another think coming!”

but no – there was none of that
not even in the tone of His voice

“Do I love Him?”

Have I not yearned for this very moment
to fall at His feet
and beg His forgiveness?

Had I not spent the last few nights tossing sleeplessly
Longing for those days to return
When we were all together
He in us and we in Him

“Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

He said,
“Feed my sheep”

This was a personal commissioning
The forgiveness I longed for went without saying
It's His default mode
Forgiving, loving, feeding, caring, healing – that was Jesus

He couldn't help it – love and compassion poured from Him
Like honey from the comb

He is the Great Shepherd – and we are His sheep
And my task was to see His work continued

Through the others
through those who would follow them
And though all eternity

“If you truly love me
you will give your life to shepherding my sheep
and the lambs of my flock

you will always go the extra mile
in all weathers and all extremes
no matter what time, or place or whatever the cost
you will do as I command – IF YOU LOVE ME!”

Before we got back to the others He stopped one last time

“Very truly I tell you,
when you were younger you dressed yourself
and went where you wanted;
but when you are old you will stretch out your hands,
and someone else will dress you
and lead you where you do not want to go.”

I remembered His hands stretched out on that cross
And I realised that He was foretelling my final days
And the ultimate price I'd have to pay

Those deep, searching eyes pierced my soul one more time
And He said
“Follow me!”

and I knew there was only one answer