

Hinde Street Methodist Church

Sunday 5 May 2019

11am Helen Cornick

The Risen Christ invites the disciples to have breakfast

On Easter Sunday a group of us met in Manchester Square Gardens for a service of Holy Communion. We remembered Christ risen – and how he appeared to his disciples early in the morning, just three days after he had been crucified. After this act of worship, still early in the morning, we returned to the church to share breakfast together.

The sharing of meals is something that I value at Hinde Street. Whether it be breakfast, the monthly Sunday lunches, or meals shared with guests from the Winter Night Shelter or Wednesday Club, be it at Soul Food or when we go to the homes of one another for a meal, they are special times. Individuals or groups of people have been involved in preparing the meals and then conversation takes place while we eat together.

In our Gospel story this morning, Jesus, the risen Christ, invites the disciples to have breakfast. They had been out all night. They were tired, dirty, fed up, having spent several hours without catching anything.

They had left their fishing trade three years previously when Jesus called them to leave their boats, their nets, their occupation, their families to follow him, and then, after the death of Jesus, there seemed little left for them to do but to return to their former trade. When we experience loss or change, often it is the old and familiar which gets us through. It makes us feel more secure. But on that night, when they returned to the old and familiar, the disciples had caught nothing.

The person standing on the sea shore told them to throw their nets out to the right side of the boat. They did so, and were not able to pull in the nets – for they were so full of fish – and yet the nets did not break.

Unable to catch fish in their own strength, when Jesus told them to throw out the nets, they made an abundant catch.

‘When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, ‘Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.’ 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. Jesus said to them, ‘Come and have breakfast.’ (John 21:9-12a)

Different commentators have suggested why it is 153 fish. One suggestion is that it represents the total number of species of fish, and the catch was a parable of the successful universal mission of the church. All could be included in the Church’s mission – Jews and Gentiles alike. And with the nets not getting torn demonstrating this inclusion still further.

Christ's church is able to hold everyone securely.

And Jesus said to them 'Come and have breakfast.' The simple invitation from the risen Christ to come and be fed - from the 'bread of life'. 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.' A 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.' He 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.' (John 21:15-17)

Three times, Jesus asked Simon Peter 'Do you love me?' Three times, in the courtyard of Caiaphas' house, Simon Peter was asked: 'You are not also one of his disciples, are you?' and he had answered: 'I am not.' Three times, before the cock crowed, Peter denied knowing Jesus. The three questions Jesus asks on the beach correspond to the three denials in the courtyard.

And there is another parallel between these accounts. Both are set by a charcoal fire. In the earlier story Peter warmed himself by the fire – and that is where he was asked about whether he was a disciple. But fearful of the consequences, he denied. And on the beach, Jesus has cooked breakfast on a charcoal fire. Here, he too questions Peter three times – and Peter has to say three times that he loves Jesus. Each time he is given a fresh start, a new commission. 'Feed my lambs; Tend my sheep; Feed my sheep.'

He has been given the task of the Good Shepherd – the on-going work of Jesus himself. What a transformation – from the one who thought he was a complete failure – despite all his promises to follow Jesus to the end, Peter had proved weak when faced with hardship – but it was he who was now being given a new opportunity to serve the risen Christ.

The Christian writer, Eddie Askew, has written a meditation based upon the questions. (Here used meditation from 'Cross Purposes' by Eddie Askew – page 98)

The commission given to Simon Peter linked back to his earlier call to catch people. Despite his failure to live up to the promises he made, Jesus was ready to restore Peter and allow him to start afresh.

We could have read the story of Saul this morning as one of the lectionary readings – the man who persecuted Christians – having an experience of the risen Christ – and changing his life – completely – symbolised in his changed name – to Paul – and how he brought others to a knowledge and understanding of Jesus, crucified and risen, so that they might have faith in him also. Saul's life was dramatically and completely transformed.

We recognise too that we have failed in what we should have done and how we should have been. The risen Lord comes to us as well, and invites us to share with him, and to help in shepherding the flock.

When Jesus was no longer walking the streets of Galilee, the task of telling people about him was left to Peter. When Jesus was no longer walking the streets of the Jewish world, the task of telling people about him was with the early Christians, like Paul. As his disciples today, we too are commissioned to witness to the risen Christ, and to tell other people of his love for them.

The risen Christ invites the disciples to have breakfast, and then instructs Simon Peter to feed others.

When are we fed?

Think for a moment of the times when you have been fed. It could be a meal that you have at home. An ordinary meal – breakfast, lunch or tea. It could be a cooked meal which you – or someone else has prepared. Maybe you are eating alone – or with someone else. It might be a meal that you eat while at work. It could be a meal which you share with friends or family when you ‘go out’ – either to their home or to a restaurant. A meal sustains your body – to enable you to keep going. When sharing with others it can also sustain your sense of well-being.

The sharing of meals has been an important part of the church trip to Leipzig this weekend. It has particularly been during these meals that much conversation has happened. Conversation has ranged from simple questions like: ‘What is this – how do you make it?’ to ‘How do you say Good morning and Good night?’ and other simple phrases – making use of phrase books and signals to each other – to much deeper questions and exploring – about what life is like in Britain and in Germany – and more specifically, how was it in the old GDR (East Germany), when life was much more difficult for Christians. How was it to be a Methodist before the unified Germany? Today several from the group will be visiting a church which was instrumental in starting the move towards the fall of East Germany, action through prayer.

Last night, Peter my husband, was telling me that in trying to share in conversation with people of a different language, they are nonetheless recognising that they are all brothers and sisters of the same ‘Methodist’ family.

The Leipzig Christians have enjoyed offering hospitality and all have appreciated exploring together and communicating with one another. The times of sharing food have not only sustained them physically, but have also fed the relationship between the two church communities. It has sustained growth and learning between them, and their shared knowledge has been broadened. They have enjoyed looking at pictures from previous visits, and have noted that different people have fed the relationship over the years, to keep it alive and growing. In Christian fellowship the meals have given sustenance – and that sustenance has come through a mutual love of the Bread of life.

How do we feed others?

We feed others when we share with them – both when we speak and when we listen – allowing someone else to tell their own story. We must nurture the times when we tell our shared stories of our faith: in individual conversations, through our class groups, and in the wider context of church. We need to encourage and enable opportunities for giving sustenance to others – both physically and spiritually – when we share in giving and receiving hospitality – in our homes and in our church.

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. 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. (John 21:7-8)

Even those who had been with him for three years didn't recognise Jesus immediately. When offering hospitality to others, we need to be watchful for the risen Christ to be present with us in our encounter.

Later in this service, we will come to communion, – we are invited, time and time again to share together the meal Jesus had earlier shared with his disciples – not bread and fish cooked on a charcoal fire for breakfast, but bread and wine – symbols of his body and blood broken and shed for us, that we might share eternal life with him, our risen Lord. It will be Jesus who invites you, and all are welcome. Amen.