

TFTD L25: On the beach

Friday April 8th: John 21



Chapter 20 of John's Gospel tells the story of the first Easter day. The Gospel writer describes how the risen Christ appeared to Mary Magdalen and then to the disciples in a locked room and breathed the Holy Spirit into them. Then it tells the story of how Jesus appeared to the disciples again, this time with Thomas present and guides Thomas's hand into his wounds so that Thomas declares Jesus to be his Lord and his God.

And then we have these words:

Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.

Which is as conclusive a conclusion to a story as you will ever read.

But if you turn the page, you will then see Chapter 21 of John's Gospel which is the story of Peter's encounter with the risen Christ by the Sea of Galilee. It really feels as if this story was added on later after a previous draft of the Gospel had been completed. Which begs the question; why add this extra story? Isn't it enough to know that Jesus rose from the dead, breathed his Holy Spirit into his followers who finally understood that he was the Son of God and set out to share their faith with the rest of the world?

The story by the Sea of Galilee begins with Peter in a despondent mood. They all go fishing but catch nothing, just like in the old days. It is as if there was no risen Christ and there was no Holy Spirit.

But wait a minute! Who's that by the side of the lake? What's he saying? Cast the net on the other side? Wow! Look at all those fish! Who is that guy again? Why it's Jesus!

Peter can't wait to get to Jesus. He swims to the shore to get to Jesus that bit sooner. And so suddenly, on the beach, he has an intimate moment with Jesus. It's just him and Jesus. And Jesus shares bread with Peter. And they all eat together; bread and the fish they caught. The meal re-established the connection between Jesus and the disciples. It was just like the old days.

And then Peter and Jesus have a very special conversation. Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him, just like the three times that Peter denied Jesus on Good Friday. Peter goes back over the conversation of that awful morning and this time he gives the right answer, 'Of course, I love you.' And Peter knows that he is forgiven. And then he receives his commission; to feed the lambs and to tend the sheep; in other words; to love the people of God the way he loves Jesus. And his relationship with the disciple whom Jesus loved is put right as well.

And now that this story has been added to the Gospel, the Gospel can finally end as it does with these more open-ended words: *But there are also many other things that Jesus did; if every one of them were written down, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written.*

We, the church, believe ourselves to be filled with the Holy Spirit. We have faith that Jesus is the Son of God and through our faith in him we have life in his name.

But what Peter's encounter by the lake shows us that actually, although this should in theory be enough, it is not enough.

We also need to come to Jesus on a regular basis. We need to repeat the words that reminds us of our sins and also of God's mercy. And we need to remember our commission and how we relate to other members of the body of Christ. And we remember this when we break bread with Jesus; when we connect with him and with others through the sacrament of Communion and fully embrace his love for us.

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PS the picture shows the church at Magdala in Galilee, where the altar has the shape of a fishing boat.