

WEEKLY SERMON

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Breakfast on the Beach

Have you ever had breakfast on the beach on holiday, perhaps after an early morning swim? It sounds very glamorous doesn't it? The warming sun breaking through the early morning mist, the sound of the waves lapping gently on the shore, the smell of freshly baked bread...

John's Gospel ends with a story of breakfast on the beach, but this breakfast on the beach was a bit different.

For those first disciples who were fishermen, the beach was a place of work, not of holiday. After all the emotional roller-coaster of the previous couple of weeks, of Jesus' passion, death and resurrection, it seems the disciples have gone back to their day jobs. Seven of them have gone fishing.

They had let the Lord down badly as disciples, running away in Gethsemane in his hour of need. But they find they aren't much good at their old job of fishing either - until a 'familiar stranger' turns up on the shore and tells them to cast their nets on the other side of the boat. Suddenly they are inundated, and the Lord invites them to land the boat, and bring some of the fish they have just caught for breakfast.

As Peter, soaked to the skin after swimming from the boat, warmed himself by the charcoal fire, it must have reminded him of that other charcoal fire a few days earlier, where he had warmed himself in the courtyard of the high priest's house and had denied three times that he knew Jesus.

But notice how Jesus treats his friend who has let him down so badly.

He doesn't freeze him out, as we might have done, or explode with recriminations, 'How could you...?'

Instead he treats him Peter with generosity, a gift and with grace. With generosity – inviting him to breakfast; with a gift – 153 fish in all, a significant cash crop; and with grace – three times Jesus reinstates him to his old job, 'Feed my sheep'.

But Jesus doesn't make it easy for Peter. It might have been easy to invite Peter back to being a disciple on the back of a night of fruitless fishing, when going back to his old job wouldn't have seemed very appealing. But now there are 153 large fish in a net waiting to be gutted, which could be a handsome dividend, perhaps enable him to pay off a loan, or expand his business. Peter must choose again and see if he can walk away and leave it all behind.

This story gives me two challenges:

- When I let the Lord down badly, as I do, will I remember he still trusts me and gives me another chance?
- When others let me down badly, as they do, will I treat them as Jesus treated Peter, with generosity, and grace?

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