

St Stephen's Canonbury London N.1

Holy Communion – 11am, 10 April 2016

Bible Readings:- Acts 9: 1-6; John 21: 1-19

Restoration & Conversion – Core of Love & Forgiveness

We celebrated Easter on 27 March when our Lord was raised from the dead. Within this period Jesus appeared three times to His disciples. See John 20:19 and 26, for the first two occasions. On those two occasions the disciples were behind closed doors. But here he appeared to them on the beach.

We heard how it came about in verse 2. Peter decided to go fishing and six other disciples followed him. The old profession still beckoned to them. But they were not good at doing it. May be they were overwhelmed by the events since the resurrection. Jesus showed them the right way to fish and they hauled 153 large fish. Meanwhile breakfast was prepared.

When buildings are rustic and showing signs of age, we restore them. Likewise if they get neglected or derelict we restore them to their usual state of usefulness and beauty. Jesus did the same to the faith of the disciples. He did it with authority and robustly through the faith of the fervent disciple – Peter the Rock on whom he had promised to lay the foundation of the church (Matt 16: 13-18). Jesus fed his apostles and reinstated Peter as a representative of all apostles so that He and they may feed His sheep, since His resurrection.

As prophesied by Jesus, the shepherd will be stricken and the sheep would be scattered (Matt 26:30-31). So it happened. But now he was putting them together again before His ascension into glory. Notice that the conversation was mainly between Peter and the Lord. The Lord invited them to breakfast and it was after breakfast that He reinstated Peter. The usual approach to his ministry – making sure that the body is fed. The reinstatement was in a challenging manner and not going down well with Peter. The challenge was repeated three times, reminiscent of the disciple's denial of his Lord. The Lord had forgiven Peter for his error before reinstating him. Not only that, Jesus went further to assign him a new role to feed his sheep.

The time has now come for Peter to shoulder much more important role. In order to do this the Lord cross-examined him thoroughly to see how much trust was left in him. He tested his faithfulness and readiness. He said "Simon son John, do you love me – feed my lambs; Simon son of John, take care of my sheep and the third time, Simon the son of John.....feed my young sheep." The questions must have struck Peter to the core of his being.

The primary mission of Christ on earth is to establish God's kingdom through his teaching and with his disciples to all his followers then and now and until his second coming. At this juncture in his ministry he was dotting the 'i's and crossing the 't's so as to ensure a continuity. This event also recalls the feeding of the 5000 as well as that of the 4000, and of course the first encounter of calling Peter and Andrew, James and John to become fishers of men.

However there is a change of emphasis and purpose. Jesus is inviting the disciples to be shepherds. He himself is the good shepherd who promised to keep, tend, protect and feed His sheep (John

10:27-28). We are all his sheep. If I say I am going to fish, your understanding will be either to enable me to have a fish meal or as a sport. But if I say I am going to be a shepherd the impression will be that I intend to keep sheep and lambs. I intend to nurture, tend, feed and protect the animals against attack. The commission is for the disciples and apostles and leaders in the church to look after the church – to grow it, feed it and protect it – the body which Christ leaves behind.

John reiterates through his gospel that the kingdom is neither earthly nor a materialistic empire. So that all in it must have to have courage, devotion and hope and must be faithful in carrying out their commission. They must possess faith in their leader – Jesus Christ and in His father, God. That is the message for you and me this morning. We have to follow our leader who is always faithful and loving to us. We must be one in the Lord.

Yet the sign of division and disagreement was rearing its head at this stage of the church to be. Peter enquired of the Lord about John remaining alive until their master's return. But the Lord put him in his place that it was no business of his if he (as the Lord) decided that John could remain alive until the second coming. So we could see that it was not plain sailing even when Christ was in the flesh. There was always a clique, a group, a faction as it is still today. But the Lord handled the situation perfectly. Remember the request by James and John asking to sit next to Jesus, on his right and left in his kingdom (Mark 10: 35); or the argument as to which of them was the greatest (Luke 9: 46). The lesson is that the Lord has assigned to us the duty to keep his sheep fed, protected and nurtured and in doing that whatever role comes our way should be carried out faithfully for it is the Lord we are serving. Are you getting tired of your commission? Is the role too much? Do you require to be refreshed? Talk it over with the Lord.

We have celebrated Easter and have demonstrated to the world that Jesus is alive and that he resurrected from the dead. What are we going to do next? Put your feet up and put your bible neatly away? Would you rather suppress all activities about the Good News until Christmas? May be the Pentecost will inspire you to have a look in again at your commission in the church and outside the church. Do you feel jaded after each important event in the church year or are you inspired to serve your Lord more passionately? Peter and the other disciples planned to desert their Lord again but the Lord pulled them back. He reinvigorated them and set them on their feet. He will do the same to each of us. The commission still stands "Feed my sheep."

Whereas Peter was reinstated Paul was converted. Paul was a bad and destructive instrument. He led the weapons of mass destruction against the church in collusion with the High Priest and the Jewish authority. Having been successful with the killing of Stephen and other disciples he decided to cast the evil net wider afield and this time to get the Jewish followers of the "way" in Damascus. But the Lord never gives up on anyone even those who hate Him. The Lord gives the sinner a long rope so as to repent.

Think of the development of atomic power for peaceful purposes especially for energy in the factories and homes, for industry and scientific research and advancement. The same resource is harnessed every day for the mass annihilation of human beings and the environment by terrorists in many places around the world. In terms of the Kingdom of God, Paul was converted from the latter to the former use. On the way to Damascus he was cornered, when the Lord Jesus directed his mighty power on him. Paul saw the bright light from above, fell down and heard a voice. His followers in the evil project heard but never saw anything. The Lord ordered him to proceed to

Damascus. There in Damascus Jesus instructed Ananias to meet Paul who was then called Saul at the house of Judas in Straight Street. Ananias was frightened because of the much havoc Paul had done to the saints in Jerusalem. But the Lord reassured him that Saul had been tamed and become “an instrument ..... to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel.” In order words the Lord had given him a commission just as he commissioned Peter and the other apostles.

We are dealing with the Fathers of the Church, two pillars of Christianity. One was the foundation on which the Lord built His church. The other was perhaps the greatest of the apostles. You are not Simon Peter or Paul. I am not either too. But our contributions to the service of God can be vital for the overall big picture of Christianity. Only the time, the place and the circumstances may differ. Here in the congregation we require a church secretary, deanery representatives, church wardens, volunteers for the work of the Manna and the Urban Hope, to mention a few. Be encouraged to serve in a position to suit your talents and capability, for it is the Lord we are serving.

In conclusion (i) God loves us all and sent his son to die for us sinners. He was raised from the dead and appeared to his disciples and others. (ii) Our Lord forgave his disciples who let him down and reinstated Peter. (iii) That his work on earth may continue he empowered the disciples to feed his sheep then and now and by so doing grow His church. He commissioned Peter. (iv) Whatsoever part we have to play in his church should be carried out faithfully and not envy others. (v) Our Lord converted Paul, and ‘roped’ him in into the cause which he kicked against vehemently. May the Lord continue to strengthen his church.