

There was a point this week when I went to check if there was a full moon or event two outside as the conversations, I had had during the afternoon were so bizarre I thought something more cosmic must be at play!

Then as no Full Moon and as yesterday was Star Wars Day – May the Fourth be with you – I wondered whether there was some kind of science fiction plot to distort the thinking of the work in the lead up to the day of celebration.

Sometimes situations seem so out of place it is hard to work out how to interpret them.

In truth, so often things which seem abnormal to one seem quite straight forward to another!

Earlier in the week, the students from Islamia Primary came through in groups as we talked through the story of Holy Week and Easter, and then looked and practices and traditions which Christians have as a result. With one of the older classes we were have a quite in-depth conversation about Jesus resurrection when I was asked a question ‘Mother Christine – how do you know and believe all this?’

It is always interesting talking about Easter with those who are unfamiliar with the story because in all honesty it is a strange and bizarre event – it is hard to explain on many levels – and yet as we discussed last Sunday – we do believe that it is true!

Today is the third week in a row that we hear stories of Jesus appearance after the resurrection, and how he is recognised. It is these stories which we use for the basis of our belief not only in Jesus resurrection, but in understanding how the Christian Church has evolved. In week one, the disciples seem not to recognise Jesus resurrection as they don’t seem to really expect it; then last week they had locked themselves away in fear, so it was harder to recognise Jesus– and then in our Gospel reading today – even knowing the resurrection had occurred, having seen Jesus in the upper room – still at first they do not recognise Jesus – but through the instruction to place the net in the other side, and then the net being full – John is the first to realise that it must be Jesus – but this is then confirmed in the sharing of a meal together.

Like in the story of Jesus appearance on the road to Emmaus, Jesus identity is confirmed in the breaking of the bread – in the sharing of a meal and prayer! The Eucharist is at that heart of our meeting together each Sunday for this very reason. When we stand at the table of the eternal banquet, we don’t only see Jesus, but Jesus lifts the veils and blinkers from our own eyes that we might see ourselves and those who are around us. This beauty, this honesty, and ultimately this vulnerability

which strips away our preconceptions so that we might truly see Jesus, others and ourselves!

After Jesus is made real in the breaking of the bread, Jesus moves from the question of his identity, to Peter's. Identity is so much about relationship. We do not know someone by seeing their picture. We know someone by conversations and interactions – by listening to stories about them, and from them. Earlier, Peter denied Jesus three times (18:17, 25-27). And in today's exchange, Jesus reinstates Peter into the fold by asking him three times to take care of his sheep (verse 15-17). Peter's importance is being reinforced and his death foretold (verse 19¹). Peter's affirmation in this is often overlooked, or at least not given the credibility or stature of his denial. But if anything, it is more important in the history of the Church. In John's account, as this conversation between Jesus and Peter takes place on the beach the other disciples move into soft focus. In some ways the mantle of leadership is being past from Jesus to Peter as the movement of Christianity emerges, and the writer of John is helping this along.

This is important when we place this interaction, and this idea of identity, alongside the conversion of Saul/St Paul which is primary reading from Acts today. Acts was written by a Christian for other Christians. That is, Luke's readers know who this Saul is; they know what turns his life will take. In short, they and we know how the movie ends! But by introducing him in this way, Luke establishes the dramatic u-turn Saul's life is about to take. In doing so, he draws a portrait of calling that continues to shape how we understand God's graceful but not always subtle pull on our lives.²

Both of these portraits of leaders – Paul and Peter are presented initially to different communities. Luke and John are both positioning the two key leaders who will grow the early church – and both die for it.

In both stories Jesus gives specific instructions too. Firstly in John, Jesus tells the disciples to not give up fishing, but put down the net on the other side. This brings an outcome they did not expect. One side of the boat makes no difference to the other generally in fishing. But in many ways Jesus is indicating the perseverance we need in faith. Keep on fishing – keep on trying. Jesus then gives another specific instruction just to Peter 'Feed my Sheep'-- to love and lead Jesus' followers is an important moment for next step in the church to come

Jesus' instructions to Saul are specific if a little less immediate or fulfilling. *Go into the city, and there you will discover what you need to do.* Saul's conversion is not just turn

¹ http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1619

² http://www.workingpreacher.org/preaching.aspx?commentary_id=1624

away from a previous way of life; more importantly, he is called, commissioned to walk in a new “Way.” Saul following the instructions doesn’t just mark his journey – it marks his new identity.

The disciples, Peter and Saul all recognise Jesus in dramatic and different ways. Yet they also encounter the subtle questioning and leading too. They are each given specific instructions about what to do – but the small instruction leads to momentous change in the life and growth of the church.

Each Easter we are asked to do the same. We are asked to recognise Jesus, and like the disciples to learn to recognise Jesus in the resurrection, in the breaking of bread together, and in our lives. But we are also asked, like each of them, to follow a specific mission and call – to go and make more disciples and to bring about the kingdom of God.

That means we are asked to live by recognizing the place we live in – and those who live here with us. We are called like the disciples, to see that there is too much injustice in the world, too much pain, too many strangers still not welcome. This give us a mission too – one we must fulfil, even when like the disciples we feel that we have been at it all night and there is no outcome. We must keep working to catch fish, in a new way maybe – to bring about change and justice - so to speak.

Once Jesus addresses the disciple’s fear, they are able to not only have open eyes, but they are able to follow instruction, and they are then able to work on Christ mission for them. But they had to let go of their own preconceptions to do this. In the end of the Gospel narrative, Jesus gives one final instruction to Peter, and to the surrounding disciples – it is simple and yet challenging – he simply says ‘follow me’!

It is a challenge. How do we see ourselves as people of faith? How do others see our faith? How do we live with the challenging space between these two perceptions?

God calls us to recognise Jesus, and to recognise ourselves – to ultimately to see what God sees in each of – potential. For, like Peter, like Paul, we know ourselves in Christ, and because of this God asks of us one thing ‘Follow me’!

During the week I saw a really good prayer based on this reading from a United Methodist teacher. I wondered if it might be out prayer as well:

Lord, save us from ourselves.

*We continue to do the same things over and over,
expecting different results.*

Lord, save us from doing too much.

*We go fishing every day,
not noticing you waiting with a meal on the beach.*

Lord, save us from doing too little.

*We say we love you,
and yet so often we neglect your sheep.*

Lord, save us from ourselves.

Help us to hear and respond when you say, "Follow Me." Amen³

³ <https://re-worship.blogspot.com/2013/03/responsive-prayer-john-21-1-19.html>