

Fear, Fishing & Forgiven

(Preached at Footscray Baptist Church on April 19, 2020 by Cheryl Williams– John 20:19 – 21:24)

Last week we left the women having experienced fear being changed to joy and undertaking a task, to go to the others (the blokes) and tell them to go to Galilee to meet Jesus.

So, this week here they are in a room dominated by fear. Hiding from the Jews after a harrowing couple of weeks. Gathering together sharing their thoughts, their confusion, their perplexity. Doors locked – worrying they might be next. Considering what they would all do now. They know, they have upset the status quo, and their lives are probably in danger. Waiting is probably not an option, waiting for what? Waiting to be arrested or worse? Should they just give it all up as a bad joke, and go back to their former lives?

Then Jesus appears.

Through the locked doors and He offers them a word of peace. He shows them his hands and his side – proof, if they needed any, that it was really Jesus. He then gives them a mission, a commission, he says he sends them into the world. They won't have to do that on their own though. He then breathes on them, he gives them the gift he had promised them, the gift of the Holy Spirit. Then he tells them what the task he has for them entails. At its core is forgiveness. The authority to forgive others and also the authority to retain from forgiving – what a task! To not just proclaim, but also, act as agents of reconciliation, to give the message of freedom and of life to the whole world. Jesus is sending them out into the world to continue exactly what he has done both in his death and resurrection and also all that he did in his life. To offer to another forgiveness, to offer to another life.

The risen Jesus meets this group in the midst of the everyday. The risen Jesus has met them in the midst of their fear and grief and gives them an almighty task. Forgive.

For some reason Thomas was not in that room. When the others caught up with him, they told him all that Jesus had done and said, all that they had seen in that room. Thomas called the twin but also known as the doubter. Thomas had many questions and wasn't afraid to ask them. We don't know why he wasn't there when Jesus first appeared – perhaps he had to take time out to make sense of it all. Maybe he was just lost in his own grief and thinking about what to do next. He wants some proof, some evidence if he is to believe – after all they have seen Jesus, he hasn't. How can he be sure they are not just imagining things?

Then Jesus meets him in same room a week later. Like the previous week he enters the room that was locked and stands amongst them all. Again, he speaks a word of peace to them. Then he offers the proof Thomas needs, come and see, come and touch my

wounds. We don't know if Thomas ever did touch those wounds, or if the offer of such and the words of peace that Jesus spoke, were all the proof he needed. Then a quiet word that there is no need to doubt, but simply believe, allow yourself to know this is true, that just like I said, I will rise after three days. Thomas, just believe! And so, he does, after all the doubts, all the questions, all the scepticism he believes and says 'My Lord and my God'.

The risen Jesus meets Thomas where he is, in the midst of his questions, his doubts. The risen Jesus simply asks him to believe.

Even after these meetings with Jesus, after the women telling them what they saw, it appears the disciples are still afraid. So, at the suggestion of Peter, a number of them (about 7) decide to go with Peter fishing. Peter the denier, the one who professes great love for Jesus and then when the crunch comes, denies ever knowing him. Peter the impetuous and fickle. Peter the one who jumps in feet first and thinks later. After all that has happened, he just seems to want to retreat to his old job, fishing. Perhaps the sea will calm him, give him a sense of peace. Perhaps he just needs to go back to what he knows. Perhaps he just needs to figure out what to do with his guilt? So, out on the water with his mates he is fishing, good physical work sometimes is a remedy for dealing with emotional issues, and he has had a bit of that lately. Denial, grief and then surprise at meeting a risen Jesus, twice! However, not much luck with the fishing, a long night with nothing to show for it.

Then at daybreak a figure appears on the beach, a stranger, suggesting they put their nets to the other side – they do and catch a huge amount, 153 fish. The others realise the stranger is Jesus, but Peter takes a bit longer to figure it out. When he does, ever impetuous, he jumps out of the boat and swims to shore, leaving the rest to bring in the boat and the fish.

After breakfast, Jesus has a special word for Peter. Three times he asks Peter if he loves him. Three times Peter had denied him. Three times Peter is given a mission – feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. And follow me. Three times, it is as though Jesus is offering him forgiveness, three times for the three denials. Like in all of the other appearance stories, Peter is given a task. Look after my flock, care for and teach the church.

The risen Jesus meets Peter in the midst of his guilt and forgives. The risen Jesus gives him a task.

The risen Christ meets people where they are, in the midst of fear, of doubt, of grief, of despair, of guilt, of questions.

The risen Christ offers a word of peace.

The risen Christ gives a task, a pretty significant task – forgive.

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This meeting the risen Christ, the word of peace that is offered, the task, is not just for those first disciples. It is for us too. We are the ones referred to when Jesus speaks to Thomas – blessed are the ones who have not seen but yet have come to believe. Us, those who have come to believe.

We cannot stay in the upper room fearful, nor can we stay on the boat fishing. We too are called to live out God's mission – to speak words of peace to the world in order to transform that world.

A scared little band of believers are empowered to go out into the world to continue Jesus' ministry of love, forgiveness and reconciliation. And so are we!