

## AUDIO RETREAT

### Easter People audio retreat 2023 | Week Four | By the shores of the sea [John 21.1-19]

#### Episode transcript

Walking past some houses this week I saw a wooden bench with a sign next to it: 'Free, please take'. I looked warily at it, expecting some of the slats or the feet to have rotted, but they seemed firm. I sat on the bench – again warily. I survived. So, as invited, I took the bench.

Why were they giving it away? Maybe it was the brown-purple paint, peeling where it had been exposed to the sun and horribly solid where it had not. It was a frightening colour. In between things in the days since I have been sanding it down.

Sometimes, when I want my mind to have fresh ideas and it isn't playing, or my mind is too full of thoughts and I want to find rest, a physical activity like sanding a bench is what works for me. I am sander-in-chief at home. I have sanded floors, cupboards, chairs, shelves – and my fingers in the process. Sanding is familiar, comfortable and within my capacity. It asks enough attention to help me move out from a cluttered head space to a restful plain where, unbidden, new insights can move in or tired thoughts can find rest.

I wonder whether it was like that for Simon Peter returning to the familiarity of fishing after the tumult of Jesus' arrest and death. Even with intimations of the resurrection I imagine his mind struggled to move on from his own fearful denial of ever knowing Jesus and the awfulness of what followed. Returning to the sea was what he instinctively knew he needed: the movement of the waves, the feel of the nets, the attention to winds and tide as the boat moved through the water. And though a long night passed without catching anything, perhaps the familiarity of place and activity was the space he needed.

When day began to break and the stranger called out to the boat, suggesting they cast their net out to the right with unexpected results, there was a moment of recognition. Simon Peter was out of the boat, forcing his way to the shore where the one he had lost and let down waited for him. And then there was breakfast – a simple meal of bread and the fish they had caught, cooked on the fire Jesus had prepared.

For me, that 'come and have breakfast' is one of the most beautiful lines in the bible – so normal, human and hospitable; such a way to ease the heart and mind of Simon Peter and his friends. No need for words – not yet – come and eat. As I sanded the bench this morning it was the simplicity and ordinariness of this story that touched me. Simon Peter, quietly attentive in a familiar task and out of this, unbidden, a moment of recognition. A simple meal of bread and fish cooked on a fire on the beach – a time for friends to be together.

I wonder if this is how Easter is: a quiet and simple presence amidst the ordinary. No blinding lights or words from heaven. No exotic liturgy; no choirs of angels. A familiar place; a task that asks enough of our attention so that we enter the here and now moment; someone there on the shore of our consciousness; one who waits for us and is sensitive to how we are; a welcome that asks nothing of us but that we come and eat.

Over these weeks we have explored four resurrection stories: Mary Magdalene greeted by name by one she supposed to be a gardener; two friends accompanied by a stranger on the road to Emmaus; Jesus entering the closed room where the disciples had fearfully gathered and greeting them with peace; Simon Peter and his companions sharing a long night's fishing until with the dawn, a familiar voice greets them and invites them to breakfast. They are moments in particular lives and they are also eternally present for each and every life.

The Easter narratives are not so much proofs of the resurrection as affirmations of continuing relationship, presence and care. There's tenderness and sensitivity in how Jesus comes alongside those who feel lost. There's acceptance and healing in words of peace and an invitation to breakfast; there's recognition of significance in being called by name and drawn aside to spend necessary time together. There is time given to hear our story and time given to have our story retold. These are Easter icons we can go on gazing at and being illuminated by: four Gospels of hope for each and for every day.

I wonder whether we worry whether our experience of God is enough: should it be clearer, louder? Does it only count if you have a message from above, a vision, a powerful feeling, or a definitive answer to a question? There are moments when such things are given; yet no less is given when – in a moment – we sense, or trust, that God is simply here, now and for us. And in the giving of God, such moments are as likely to appear when we are sanding a bench or walking along a road as when we are reading the bible or focused in our prayer.

These glimpses are neither looked for, nor expected. The hope that wakes in these windows of recognition will not die, but the moments themselves cannot be held in our grasp. There will be difficulties and doubts again. Fears and failings will still arise. Life will not be trouble free. Mornings will still rise with uncertainties and evenings still fade with what is unresolved. But whether in a garden, or on a seashore, or on a long road – wherever we find ourselves – hope will wait for us, walk with us, break bread for us, call us by our name.