Sermon for Easter 3 (4th May 2025)

Jeremiah 32.36-41
Psalm 30
Acts 9.1-6 [7-20]
John 21.1-19

(Dictated, so please forgive occasional errors)

I think I have become morbidly fascinated by international politics. Whether it's the US, the Middle East, Ukraine, the endless bitter sophistry about what does & doesn't affect sex and gender (which you would not expect to be listed under international politics, but here we are). I find myself ghoulishly wondering exactly how bad it can get. As we watch both figurative and literal bodies pile up, it is like I have made my bed in the cemetery, in order the better to watch the rot. I know it is not good for me.

But, in terms of living with crises it probably sits somewhere between going on a witch hunting murder spree and simply going home. On balance (you'll be pleased to know) I have more sympathy with Peter. When I'm not staring at the horror, I do tend to shut the door, put my head down and shrink my world down to what is safe and dependable. That line, "I'm going fishing," spoken after the rollercoaster of Easter, must be one of the most relatable in the whole Bible – though in my imagination it's preceeded by, "blow this for a game of soldiers". Some commentators are outraged by the disciples' back sliding into their own old lives but from my knowledge of myself, how easily I revert – and we have the benefit of thousands of years of reflection on the Easter mysteries that these young men in this morning's gospel were in the midst of – I honestly think it's fair.

No, rather than the disciples' wobble, what we need to fix our eyes on is what John is underlining about the overwhelming abundance of God. It is everywhere in this narrative. From the reminder of Cana, the threefold call to love, the fact that the fish overwhelms the net and yet Jesus is already waiting with food regardless of their fishing. This is the resurrection appearance that tells us that Jesus comes to us, finds us where we are, with all that we need and more besides. There is no need for fear, no cause for despair.

If only, if only we could trust that abundance.

Because this is what Easter is: the overpowering life and love of God re-creating everything, even a cursed death. When we trust this love, we will find our nets overflowing; if we allow it to knock us from our path it will unpick even the most profound hate and fear; if we can school our hearts to faithfulness, it will gather us from

the furthest corners to which we have been scattered by our own disharmony as much as by the forces of chaos that so often seem to rule this world.

Again and again the Scriptures tell us that in God there is not only enough, there is quite preposterous excess. And we are invited to step into the love – if you like to dive into it – and let God, just let her, lavish us with life in all its fullness. we are called – invited urged begged – to climb out of the crypt and be transformed into his new creation.

But there is a cost. For that abundance, that generosity, that willingness to know even those most bitterly opposed to us, we receive it in order to make it part of ourselves and to be generous – insanely, recklessly generous – in turn.

Feed my lambs

Tend my sheep.

Feed my sheep.

Be taken where you do not wish to go and

Follow me.

And that looks frightening when resources are tight and when people come breathing threats and murder, when the whole world order seems to be coming apart at the seams, when all our instinct clamers to dig ditches, board up the hatches and a stare, star, stare at the horror.

But, my friends, the angel in the tomb asked the women what they were doing there. For we do not belong in the graveyard, but in the garden. Which is why, I say again, we must fix our eyes and hearts on this love of God. For by our baptism we were made part of it, dying to death and being raised with Christ to his life. It is easy enough to turn back to our old life, but we must, like Peter, jump into those waters again and again. With every empty cross, with every crossing of ourselves, with every blessing and absolution, every invocation of the Trinity whose life we share, we turn our face again to the beach to that washing and to the invitation to be fed from God‘s own bounty.

And by our sharing this meal, this breakfast, this is heavenly banquet we take God‘s promises into our own bodies, being fed by her generosity and being formed by it.

And by our gathering around the word, we are built up in love, a mutual surface, and gentleness so that we can carry one another’s burdens and learn, among friends, to unpeel our fingers from our self, and to remove our eyes from the things of death, and fix all our intent on God.

And then, and then we are sent out to feed those lambs not of this fold, to go where God causes us to be his transforming presence in the world, to follow where Christ leads.

If we can step out, thus, from this place, my friends, what transformation awaits us! Empty nets filled, denial converted into affirmation, murderers reborn and renamed, mourning and death becoming life and joy, and the scattered world restored as the family of God.

This is our hope and our calling, both, and it rests not just on the promises of God – and they are mighty – but on the great demonstration of the glory of God, the restoration to which we are called and in which we already have a share – *that Christ, once raised from the dead dies no more; death has no dominion over him*– nor, by extension, over us.

Hallelujah! Christ is risen!

He is risen indeed, hallelujah!