

Sunday 4 May – Third Sunday of Easter

Sermon by Wendy Borgartz

An audio recording of the sermon will be available after the service at [Sermons \(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk\)](http://Sermons(tk-tiptree-braxted-benefice.org.uk))

I would like you all to imagine this morning that you are Peter. You are an ordinary working-class man in first century Palestine, a fisherman, with a family to look after and provide for. Three years ago, your life was turned upside down when you met this man called Jesus. You had been out all night fishing, you were exhausted, but because you are a kind and helpful person, when Jesus asked if you would take him out in your boat so he could use it to talk to the crowds who had followed him, you agreed. You listened to Jesus telling people many different stories about God, and it felt good. Then he asked you to do something completely mad, to go back out in bright sunlight and try to fish again, and to your amazement you caught a huge number of fish. You recognized there was something really special about this man Jesus, and you left your family and all your responsibilities to follow him for three years.

During this time, Jesus talks a lot about his Father in heaven, about God's kingdom and what God is really like. Sometimes you find it easy to understand, sometimes it seems impossible or just too difficult to comprehend. So many times, you manage to say the wrong thing. What Jesus says and does is so different in many ways to what the Priests say, although it is the same as what the Prophets said. All those people the Priests look down on, but Jesus befriends them, all the people he heals, even bringing people back to life. Then it starts to get dark and scary, all the Jewish leaders seem to have it in for Jesus. He starts to say really strange things about dying and coming back to life again, you are confused because you don't see how this can be possible.

Then you all go to Jerusalem for the Passover festival, you share a meal together and Jesus tells you to eat bread and drink wine in remembrance of him. You are sad and you are frightened, but you promise Jesus you will always be there beside him, you don't believe him when Jesus tells you that you will deny you know him three times in the next few hours, before the cockerel

crows at dawn. Then the guards come and arrest Jesus, he won't let you fight back, they take him away. The other disciples all disappear, but you manage to gather your courage and follow Jesus and the guards in secret, creeping through the streets of Jerusalem to stay out of their way. You know they are questioning Jesus inside the building they take him to, but you stay outside, keeping watch. You creep out of the shadows to the fire. Three times different people suggest you are one of Jesus's followers, and three times you angrily say you are not. Then you hear the cockerel crowing and remember what Jesus said. You are so disappointed in yourself and so angry at yourself, you cry tears of rage, frustration, fear and disappointment.

The story seems to end here, Jesus dies on the cross, just like the criminals on either side of him, yet you know he has done nothing wrong. You hide away in fear with the other friends of Jesus, unable to bear the sadness and grief at the death of your friend. Then the women come back from the tomb with some fantastical story about Jesus not being there and you shake off your fear to run and see for yourself that his body is not there. The women start telling all your friends they have seen Jesus alive. It all seems impossible, you really do not understand.

So, you go fishing again, back to the start of your story with Jesus, and once again you fish all night and catch nothing. As you come back into shore, there is a man standing on the beach and he tells you to put back out and let your nets down again, even though it is broad daylight, and you catch a huge number of fish once again. Suddenly you realize that it really is true, Jesus is alive and he is the one on the beach. You are so excited and overwhelmed you jump right out of the boat and run to hug him. In that moment of excitement, you forget your shame and how bad you feel about having left Jesus. But Jesus knows how you feel, somehow, he always knows, and he asks you three times if you love him. Three times you say of course you do, getting more frustrated each time, and each time Jesus tells you to look after his sheep, his flock of followers. Jesus shows you that he has forgiven you, and not only that; he is giving you a new job, new responsibilities. You don't know how you are going to manage it, but you just know that you have to try.

I love Simon Peter. So many times, he manages to open his mouth and put his foot in it, he always seems to be getting things wrong – and I am sure we all sometimes feel as if we are the same, putting our foot in it, getting things wrong. But Peter is the rock Christ chose on which to build His church. As with so many other people, Jesus always seems to see different things in people to the rest of the world. His eyes are not the same as the world's eyes. Jesus knows that with the help of the Holy Spirit he will be sending to help them, Peter can lead his people forward in the right way, in God's way. Jesus forgives Peter and gives him a big new task to undertake.

And that is just so immensely encouraging. Jesus knows us, he knows us inside out, and he sees the real us, what we are like inside. Jesus knows that, like Peter, we will get things wrong, we will make mistakes, we will run away and hide, we will struggle with doing the right thing all the time. This episode on the beach after the resurrection shows us that whatever we may get wrong, in the same way that Jesus forgives Peter out of his deep and abiding love for him, Jesus will also forgive us out of his deep and abiding love for each of us. The love Jesus has for us doesn't disappear if we get things wrong, we only have to turn back to Christ and seek forgiveness and it will be given to us in ways that may surprise us. We may find ourselves doing things we didn't think were possible, like Peter the ordinary working man who became an important leader in the early church. Our own paths will not be the same as Peter's, we will all face our own challenges in life and our own crosses to bear, our own joys and tragedies, but God is constant through all those times, He is always there loving us and supporting us and giving us the strength to keep going if we just trust in Him. As the Psalmist wrote, 'You, Lord, with your favour, made me as strong as the mountains.' We all have that strength within us, that comes from God, and for which we all are thankful.

Amen