

RECOGNISING JESUS IN THE NEW NORMAL: 4. GOING FISHING

John 21:1-14.

Three weeks after the Easter weekend at least seven of the eleven are together, back home in Galilee where Jesus had told them to go to meet him. This time Thomas has joined the crew. He's learned his lesson and he's not doing his own thing.

Peter suggests that they go fishing and the others agree. Some of these guys had left jobs as commercial fishermen. We know that three years ago Peter had been worried about how it would work out. But, he had followed Jesus and Jesus had paid his way. Now that decision was coming back to bite them. Since the night he was arrested Jesus had talked about doing something quite different in the future that doesn't involve them. To make it worse their savings had disappeared with Judas the group treasurer had run off, purse with him and all. So far Jesus hadn't turned up in Galilee and there were bills to be paid. They had to be sensible. With no money and no plan, the new normal was shaping up and it didn't look great.

Hoping to make some money, the best way they knew how, they spend all night fishing and catch nothing. It must have reminded them of their last fishing trip they'd had the same sort of night—a complete waste of time. Three years ago when they got to shore, tired, aching, and fed up, Jesus had asked to use the boat as a stage. At the end of his talk he had told them to throw the net out on the other side. That's how it had all started. 'Don't be afraid', Jesus had said to Peter. From now on you will fish for people. It will be OK.' Great days. Only three years. It must have seemed like a lifetime ago.

As they rowed back through the morning mist. There were no noisy crowds on the beach this time wanting to hear Jesus just one solitary figure camped out beside a fire. 'Hi boys', the man by the fire shouts out. 'You don't have any fish do you?' 'No such luck', they reply. 'Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.' Almost as though they were in a dream, repeating the events of the day that changed their lives three years ago, they throw the net over the side and within seconds are grabbing for the ropes. It is full, too heavy to pull in. John is the quickest thinker among them. 'It's the Lord', he says. Slower to think but quicker to action. Peter is straight over the side. Splashes his way to the shore. Gets to land. I can imagine that Peter is standing there with his mouth open. Trying to make sense of it all. Before his head and his heart explode, Jesus breaks in. Why don't you bring some of the fish you've just caught?

Peter nods, realises from the grunting behind him what's happening and goes back to help land the catch 153 fish large ones. Somebody counted them. Enough to sell and start a new business.

That breakfast was full of awkward silences. None of the disciples dared ask him if he was the Lord. Nobody had the nerve to ask where the barbecue had come from. Perhaps there had been some kid going past who had offered his lunch to Jesus. (There are only two food stories recorded by John. This one and that one.) They were also embarrassed that they remembered that last time they had had a catch like that, they had pulled their boats up on shore left everything and followed the guy who was now raking the coal and handing out the bread.

So, from the unprecedented of the Easter season to our unheard-of experiences in 2020. You've probably been joining the dots. Were the disciples getting there or not? John says it was the third time that Jesus appeared to them and they were still struggling to recognise him in the new environment.

Three takeaways—enough to keep you going for a day or two.

Takeaway #1. In unprecedented circumstances, Jesus looks different even when you're out of lockdown and are beginning to get your head on. When the new normal is anything but normal, it takes time and repeat experiences to discern the Spirit

Takeaway #2. A Galilean bonus. When we add the last page of Matthew's record to Johns we can see that Jesus had planned two key appointments A few days later they meet him on a Galilean hillside like the one that Jesus had prayed and then chose the twelve to be with him and to send him out to preach. This time he was sending them out for good with the promise that for sure he would always be with them. As you think about whats next don't hope too much for a return to the old normality People are talking about taking a virtual holiday Take yours back to the beach where Jesus first said to you follow me Revisit your mountainside where he drew you in as a friend and gave you your first job. What's your great commission in our anxious world?

Takeaway #3. I'm pretty sure after doing something sensible with the miracle financial bonus, Thomas, Peter and the rest took a big step up. A few weeks later Peter was saying 'I've got no money, but I've got something better. Why don't you stand up and walk?' For our unstable new normal we need to be aware of God in new places, and we need fresh resources too. Get waiting guys. Tell yourselves: Pentecost is round the corner. The Spirit will fill us with the power we need.