

Broken But Not Finished

There is one verse in the Bible that sums up for me the ministry of Jesus, and that is John 10:10.

I have come to give life, and life in all its fullness.

Yesterday was May Day and I was along the canal bank – at the moment, it is so full of life....little ducklings, no more than a day old swimming with their mothers, swans sitting on their eggs...waiting...birds chirping, building nests and there is a whole sense of life in all its fullness

I have come to give life, and life in all its fullness said Jesus.

In our first reading, we heard him say, *“I am the true Vine, and my Father is gardener and he cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit while every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful.”* [John 15:1]

Another metaphor about life...*I am the vine. He is the life...the spiritual life...*

John gives us another of Jesus' excellent metaphors about who he is, his relationship to his Father, and where we fit into the process.

Gardener – Vine and Branch.

We are the branches of the vine and our task is to simply bear fruit, and when we don't, the branch is snapped or pruned.

It is a metaphor for Christian discipleship and Christian living and it can't be any plainer.

Our second reading focusses on that extraordinary moment when Jesus returns, after his death, to the disciples. The disciples are back in Galilee. In fact they are fishing on the lake.

What is remarkable about this meeting with Jesus is that it takes the disciples back in time, to their first meeting three years earlier, where Jesus called them to follow him.

The wheel has gone full circle and they are back where they began...Fishing!

Those of you who know me well, will know that I am a fan of Neil Diamond. A party is never a party for me until Neil Diamond has sung and one of my favourite songs begins,

Where it began, I can't begin to know when

But then I know it's growing strong

Wasn't the spring

And spring became the summer

Who'd have believed you'd come along

Hands, touching hands, reaching out

Touching me, touching you...

For Peter this moment on the lake took him back to where it all began for him three years earlier, when Jesus told him to set his boat into deep water and let his net down for a catch.

Remember his words on that first crucial meeting... *"Master we've worked hard all night long and caught nothing but since it's you, I will let down my nets"* and they caught such a large catch, then Peter fell to his knees and said, *"Away from me Lord for I am a sinful man,"* and this is the first of many times that Peter has been broken. But Jesus sees the potential and he tells Peter that day that he will be a fisher of men, bringing people into the Kingdom of God.

Then three years later, and Jesus was crucified, the dream ended and Peter again was a broken man.

But Jesus wasn't finished with him and that's what today's story is all about. Peter is a work in progress, he may be broken, he may be pruned but Jesus has to take Peter back to where it all began.

It's always a moving experience to go back to where it began. As I get older, I see myself going down that road often.... going back...reminiscing...thinking about how it all began, especially when I return to Tarbert. Your mind drifts to earlier days and your youth, your parents, your coming to faith, and this weekend my grandchildren are down in Tarbert, visiting their great grandmothers and I've seen photos of them playing on the same shore as I did as a boy and your mind goes back to where it all began...

We are just like Peter, we reflect on life and we go back to what we know and what we are safe with, and for Peter it was fishing. What else did Peter know? It was his life.

So here he is back to his old life, with time to think about his failure.

And just like the first time that Jesus called him to follow him, they had caught nothing...without Jesus, they were fruitless, broken off, struggling, going through the motions. But then Jesus arrives and everything begins to change.

Psalm 30:5, *"Weeping may last for the night, but joy comes with the morning."*

So, Peter encounters Jesus on the shore, as they eat breakfast together. It was like old times, but Peter is hurting. Jesus is fixing him.

Look at what happens....Firstly, he challenges Peter:

Simon, Son of John, do you truly love me more than these?

He asks him three times this same question...Why? He is fixing Peter's broken heart. Each time Peter is dealing one his denials. Three times he denies knowing Jesus and now Jesus gives him the opportunity to make three amends.

Do You love me? And Peter said to Jesus, *you know that I love you.*

Here we get to the heart of what it is to be a Christian. This is the question that we need to answer. Do you love him? Do you love this man from Galilee, who gave his life for you? Who allowed people to crucify him on a cross, so that your sin could be forgiven? Do you love him, for what he has done for you?

Yes, we can learn the old creeds and study doctrine and get BDs and PhDs in theology, but when it all boils down, it is this same old question which is life changing – do you love Jesus? And that was the question that Jesus asked Peter. It was the only question that would bring healing to his broken heart.

Of course we need the intellectuals who quest for truth, we need the philosophers to build strong arguments for God; but at the end of the day, we hear again Jesus' words to Martha, *"Martha only one thing is needed and Mary chose the one thing."* To sit at his feet and to worship him.

There was once a Russian artist who painted a picture of the last supper. When it was finished, being rather pleased with it, he took it to Tolstoy and said, *"I want your opinion of my picture. What do you think of my Christ?"* And Tolstoy, having looked carefully at the painting, turned round with blazing eyes at the artist and with a voice trembling with emotion exclaimed, *"You don't love him! For if you did, you would have painted him better. And if you don't love him, what right have you to touch him at all."*

Do you love me? A simple, searching and saving question which led to Peter's confession.

From the threefold challenge – *Do you love me?* To the three-fold confession. *Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*

The word that Peter uses here is the word that means friend. Literally, you know that I am your friend. He didn't want to use the sacrificial word of love that Jesus used because he had let Jesus down so often. But Peter wanted to prove his love for Jesus. But how could he – how could he prove he was a friend?

He had absolutely nothing to appeal to, and then in a flash of inspiration he finds his appeal. He makes his appeal based on Jesus's grace. *Lord you know all things, you know that I love you.*

In other words, *Lord you can see the bigger picture, you have seen my failure - my guilt – my brokenness, but you know, Lord, that deep in my heart, despite everything.... I love you.*

Friends that's where we have to go as well. Our friendship, our love for Jesus and our love for God, do not depend on our own strength, or our faith, they depend upon the love and grace of God shown through Jesus.

Our final appeal will not be any righteous act that we have done, but it will be the righteousness of the one and only Son of God, and if we are standing before God, and he says to us, "*Do you love me*", in Peter we find our response, "*You know all things, you know that I love you.*"

So, we have heard Christ's challenge; Peter's confession, and the third and final thing is Jesus' commission to Peter.

Threefold Challenge, Threefold Confession and now Threefold Commission.

Jesus said to Peter three times.... *Feed my lambs, take care of my Sheep and feed my sheep.*

In these words, we see that Peter has been restored and that Jesus is entrusting him with his Church.

Would we have trusted Peter after how he let Jesus down?

Would we have commissioned him to be the shepherd of the flock?

Perhaps not, we would want to give him time to make sure that Peter was truly repentant and truly capable, but not Jesus.

Peter is put back on the vine.

His branch restored. He is part of Christ and Jesus is part of him and as long as that relationship remains, Peter will be forever the shepherd of the flock.

You are the rock on which I will build my church said Jesus to him on an earlier occasion. The confession and faith of Peter is that rock, a rock which has stood the test of time and we can look back with hindsight and say *yes Lord, you got it right, he was your man and on his confession your church has lasted for 2000 years.*

And in that glorious moment, Peter 's faith begins to shine. This was a breakfast that he would never forget – a breakfast that filled him to the full, not with food but with the spirit of Jesus.

Peter was challenged, Peter made a confession of faith and now he receives his commission, to serve the Lord in his church.

So Peter is to go and feed and take care of the sheep of the flock – those who are following Jesus and will follow Jesus and years later as a wise Christian saint, Peter wrote...1 Peter 5:1-2.....**To the Elders and the Flock**

¹ To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder and a witness of Christ's sufferings who also will share in the glory to be revealed: ² Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, watching over them—not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be..."

So, Peter is restored and this is the Gospel of hope. A Gospel which offers to each and every person the opportunity to be restored and brought to fullness of life in Jesus.

So, like Peter, we can drift from our faith, we can feel broken off, we can feel isolated but the truth is Jesus will not give up and he will come searching for us. Perhaps we need to go back to where it all began and meet again with him in that place where we first heard the call to Follow Him.