Third Sunday of Easter – 4 May 2025

Message – Learning from St Peter

Creator, Redeemer, Giver of New Life, open our hearts and minds to see you. **Amen.**

Reading new commentaries is fun. It is probably a good thing that I can say that given my vocation. I was going to say, 'my chosen job', but I suspect that being a priest is neither chosen nor a job. It appears more to be the way in which God has been gently moving me, though, as Thomas Merton puts it, *'I may know nothing about it'*.

Peter may have felt similarly. He probably thought of himself as a fisherman; Jesus told him he was going to be a fisherman of men. Though we usually translate it as *'fisher of people'*. We lose the repetition in our translations; it is the same word that we translate as fisherman and fisher. Peter had probably thought that he knew where his life was heading. Where God is involved, such assumptions are, as many of you will know, unreliable.

Today's gospel is the first mention in the gospel of John that Peter was a fisherman. It is one of the places where we can see that John's gospel assumes a knowledge of another gospel. And, seeing this, it can put many of the other narratives of John's gospel in a different light. Yet, we are not sure which of the other gospels it was, it may even have been all of them. We are still left guessing.

The narrative here shows clear echoes of the calling

narrative in the gospel of Luke, even though that was written for a gentil audience and we think that John was written for a Jewish audience. Nonetheless, the echoes are interesting. Both involve large catches after an unproductive night. In Luke the nets are nearly breaking, in John the nets are not the problem, it is the challenge of bringing the catch ashore. This is perhaps laying the ground for what is to follow. Earlier in John we have been told Jesus will not lose any whom God has given to him (6:39).

Given that Jesus is about to depart, we may be wondering how this will be the case. Some argue that chapter twenty-one of the gospel of John is a later addition by another author. The evidence is not clearcut in either direction. Yet it seems that it fulfils in a small way something of the role of Luke's acts of the apostles. There is a need for us to understand how the mission of Jesus, handed on to his apostles, continued through them.

In this chapter we are given pointers to the life and work of the disciples. As humans we are good at creating division amongst ourselves. But here we are given no division. Peter is given the charge of caring for the other disciples.

However, this is not the Peter we have met earlier in the gospels. This is not the Peter who says he is ready to die with Christ. This is a humble and more realistic Peter. Asked, *'Do you love me more than these?'* He really answers the first part of the question, *'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.'* He cannot know whether he love Jesus more than the others. All Peter can say for certain is *'Lord, you know*

everything; you know that I love you.' The experience of failure appears to have brought him to a new place.

We are told that Peter felt hurt that Jesus asked him a third time, *'Do you love me?'* We are not told why he felt hurt. Was it in that moment that he was reminded of his three denials? We had already had a little hint of the denials as they happened around a charcoal fire, and this encounter is happening around one too.

We then have a prophesy from Jesus as to the nature of Peter's death. It seems to point to a subtle difference between the master and the disciple. Jesus willingly chose the path of the cross. It seems Peter having said he was willing to die will not so willingly give up his life. Yet, he would, as did Christ in his death, *'glorify God.'*

And, Jesus, having made it clear that Peter is reinstated as the rock on which others will build, as the shepherd of the sheep, as the fisher of people, is given one simple command, *'Follow me.'* This is the call to all of us, it is the point of the gospel, that we should follow the way of Christ.

Chapter twenty-one does not end here but rather with a question about the disciple whom Jesus loved. Peter wanted to know what would happen to him. The writer of the gospel may well have been addressing heartfelt loyalties to the different apostles but is making it clear that each has their own calling, just as it is for us today.

Those who chose to give our church the dedication to Saint Peter presumably had a vision of what this church might be.

I am not sure if they thought that it might be a cathedral though a dedication to Saint Peter or to St Peter and St Paul would not be unusual for a Cathedral. Whatever their thinking, I am sure that the dedication was chosen to help shape us as a community. We are being invited to walk in the shadow of Saint Peter. Not the Saint Peter we see in the early gospel narratives but the Peter he became.

This is a challenge for any church. How are we to be a shepherd to the wider community of followers of the way. We are a place of refuge and, most of the time, a welcoming community. We can, on our good days, hold people who need a place to be held. This is a part of the role of a cathedral community. We are here to allow people the level of involvement they need at any given time.

Some people will want to be involved as they would with any other church. Others will be on a, possibly slow, journey of healing; we are here to hold them. Some will need a space where they can be fed and cared for with no greater involvement than that. We may not even be their final destination. On a good day, we can do that too. We are also here for those who are passing through, visitor of all kinds, some passing through Kirikiriroa-Hamilton, some just wanting to sample a different church.

As a cathedral community we are, like Peter, called to *'Feed my sheep.'* It is not always an easy calling and it may take us to some unexpected places but like Peter, those places will be the ultimate fulfilling of all that we hoped to be.

Jesus calls us very simply to *'Follow me.'*

We do not know with any certainty where that will lead us. We may like Peter be called to a life of care leading to the cross. We may like John be called to a long life of deep reflection building the body of Christ in a different way.

No way is better than any other, all are a part of the whole. As a Cathedral church our calling is to be more like Peter than John. We are here to care for all of the churches in our diocese and for all who follow Christ but we are called to do that in a way that is specific to our context. It will not look exactly like any other cathedral community.

Together may we seek to follow the example of Saint Peter and feed all God's sheep. Like Peter, we have some rough edges. Like Peter, we have great potential.

Amen. Amen.