



The Third Sunday of Easter  
14 April 2013

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## Simply Living Resurrection

A sermon by Revd Richard Carter

**Readings: Acts 9.1-6; Revelation 5.11-end; John 21.1-19**

The week after Easter, I spent a week at Hilfield Friary in Dorset where I joined a group of Melanesian Brothers and Sisters who have come from the other side of the world – the Solomon Islands, a small group of islands, many of them barely a metre above sea level, in the South Pacific. I had the privilege of spending many years of my life, as many of you will know, as Chaplain of this community and a Brother myself. The eleven that have come to UK have been invited to lead a mission around six different dioceses in the Anglican Church, ending up here at St Martin's for their final service at 6.30pm on 2<sup>nd</sup> June. The reason I was with them last week was to help them prepare. And of course to help me to unprepare – to shed for a while the rush of London and to *be* again, to be with them. Their mission is called 'Simply Living'. But what is it that a group of brothers and sisters from the other side of the world, from a country where most of the villages have no electricity, roads, reliable transport, hospitals, businesses or even toilets, what is it we can learn from them? A hundred and fifty years ago, missionaries from England brought them the good news of Jesus Christ, saw them as the sheep that needed to be fed, but now roles have reversed, and they are the missionaries. But what can we learn about Christ from a group who have little secondary education and mostly survive on food they grow for themselves, and fishing? The Simply Living Group themselves were, not surprisingly, daunted when I met them. The programme devised for them by Anglican churches and cathedrals looked overwhelming – from leading study days, to clergy conferences and retreats, to youth programmes, and cathedral open days, and visits to schools and taking part in every imaginable English expression of church. What would they say, in a language which for most of them was their third or fourth tongue? Perhaps it is impossible. But I am reminded them of another group of fishermen and very ordinary human beings, men, women and sinners who were chosen by Christ for a mission – the mission to witness to his resurrection; to speak not only with words but with their lives. This first group of disciples were also afraid, locked away in an upper room for fear of the Jews. It was this group who Jesus commissioned to be his witnesses to the ends of the earth.

We began our preparation with Bible Study: 'Blessed are the poor in Spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of God.' "I wonder," we asked, "when we have been poor in Spirit and witnessed the love of God, witnessed resurrection." There was a silence, and then as often happens, growing anxious, I began to share, more to cover the awkwardness and the silence than because I had anything to say. But then the Brothers from Melanesia began to speak: "I remember when my seventeen year old brother died from internal bleeding and all I could do was pray and wonder why God had not heard me. It was only later I would know." Another spoke: "I remember being out fishing in a small canoe and being swept out far from land and thinking I would never return, the waves were so big all I could do was pray." "I remember," said another, "spending three months with my grandfather before he died, washing him and dressing and caring for him." And it was he who prepared his grandfather's body for burial when he died. "And I remember," said another, "when I could not stop drinking alcohol and I thought I was not fit to serve God and could never ever be forgiven." And as they spoke I remembered too, remembered sitting with this community on the day we heard that seven of our Brothers and members of the community had been murdered by rebel forces, and believing that nothing could overcome this tragedy. And yet is it not this very death that has become the source of resurrection I long to witness to? These brothers and sisters jolted us out of security into

the real meaning of faith where life and death are at stake. Raw words, words opening up the wounds of our humanity; humanity longing to know resurrection.

Listening to them I am not surprised that Jesus chose the poor in spirit to be his witnesses to the world. It is here in our own poverty, whatever that poverty may mean for each one of us, that Christ is revealed. It is when hands are opened, it is when hearts are broken, it is when we discover the humility to acknowledge our need of God, that we allow God room to come in. The resurrection of Christ is not something we can plan for, but we can make space for God to work his miracle of life. If our eyes and our hearts are really open, do we not sometimes see that resurrection is happening here and now in the very places and times we least expected to find it? The truth is that the resurrection does, thankfully, not depend on us, it depends upon Christ. The words of a parishioner once more return to me: "How can I serve Christ, I am so incomplete." My only response: "We need Christ to complete us, and the more incomplete we realise we are the more space we allow for Christ to come."

Today's is the story of Jesus' first apostles and witnesses. They too are nothing more than fishermen. Let us consider this story of resurrection again. This group of failed disciples have been out fishing all night and caught nothing. Why failed? Because they have failed spectacularly to be loyal to the one they followed, to understand his teaching, or to have the courage, so far to live out his message. And Peter, of course, more than most. Imagine yourself in his situation after the cock crowed. Would he not be feeling that he has failed big time, that he was not worthy of any trust put in him? Would he not be overcome by shame? But at daybreak in the early morning light Jesus stands on the beach and calls to this same group of fishermen again just he has done at the beginning of his ministry. "Children, you have no fish have you?" He knows already. They've caught nothing, a sign for fishermen that something is wrong, out of kilter, a sign that God's blessing has somehow come to an end. And then the call again to trust, to obey, a call which seems against all our expertise and to defy our pride. "Cast your net to the other side of the boat and you will find some." As any fishermen will tell you, this is ludicrous advice. Do you think they, who have been fishermen since they were kids, and here have been fishing all night, do you think they do not know how to spot a shoal of fish? Teach your grandmother to suck eggs! But they obey, and now suddenly the whole net is thrashing with fish, so many that they cannot haul it in, 153 of them! Notice the way Christ speaks in signs and actions, beyond words: in Holy week, riding a donkey, washing feet, breaking bread. But what about signs and actions of resurrection? Well, here they are: a net pulsating with flashing silver life, in the very place where before there has been nothing; a net bursting with God's abundance, so full that the disciples cannot pull it in. Here is the sign that he is risen: Christ walking on the beach and preparing a crackling fire for an early morning breakfast, like we did on Easter morning. And the ashamed Peter, the one who has failed so spectacularly, standing there, stripped naked before his Lord, hurriedly trying to put on some clothes to cover himself only then to jump into the lake to swim the hundred yards to reach Jesus first. Here is resurrection, when love and joy and eagerness overcome our shame.

The narrative of resurrection is one of shock and utter amazement. How unbelievable if the disciples had had it all worked out in advance. In fact they can't get their heads around it. They don't even at first recognise who it is. Peter is so confused that he puts on all his clothes only then to jump into the sea! That's irrational! So is resurrection! Yet resurrection is breaking open their world and they are being jolted into new life. They cannot explain it or understand it, they are simply living it, living resurrection, where love overcomes shame, and communion overcomes division and where life has overcome death. And the most bewildering thing of all is that we too are called to live out this narrative of resurrection in our own lives.

I can't do it! I don't even know if I believe it! Who is the risen Christ? I wouldn't recognise him if I saw him! Well neither did those first disciples. But they were shaken into resurrection by its reality. Just as that group of fishermen from Solomon Islands are shaking people into the risen life in Exeter Diocese this week. They have just been on the phone to me as I write this address; the first week in Exeter has gone brilliantly, everyone loves the mission, it sounds like resurrection, a

net full of fish, the Bishop was weeping in their presentation on the environment, tonight they got everyone dancing, the parish are out in force, everyone is cooking fish and sharing stories with them, and divisions and barriers are breaking down, and outsiders are coming in, and insiders are coming out, for the net is bursting with life.

And this call is not just of course for Melanesian Brothers and Sisters. It's for us all: Christ asks each one of us to answer his question "Do you really love me?" "Yes, you know that I love you." "Then feed my lambs... do you really love me?" "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you" "Tend my sheep." A third time to each one of us, "Do you really love me? Then feed my sheep." You and I too are called, to answer that question and to be witnesses of that love and tender care stretching out to the ends of the earth. How much the earth needs it. How much we need it. Today, look for the signs of resurrection in your own life. Perhaps you have not noticed them, perhaps not as obviously as a pulsating net full of fish. But look and listen for Christ – the promise is that resurrection will be there too – calling you out of shame and the fear of failure into communion in the morning light; simply living in Christ's love, even here in the centre of London.