

Christ Church: Easter 3 John 21:1-19, Acts 9:1-6

Where or how do we meet with the Risen Lord *today*?

We've just heard two encounters with the Risen Jesus. St Paul's experience is perhaps one of the most famous, and his conversion is sometimes unhelpfully held up as the blueprint for religious experience. A sudden flash from heaven—Jesus appearing in blazing brightness, confronting Paul, (or Saul, as he was formally known). Paul's conversion appears as a full U-turn, as he changes direction from being an avid persecutor of Christians, to the greatest evangelist in the church's history. Certainly, a hard act for any of us to follow if this "conversion" experience of meeting the Risen Christ is the norm.

In the Gospel reading, we hear that the disciples are fishing in the Sea of Tiberias (also known as the Sea of Galilee). Here they meet the risen Jesus in familiar territory, doing familiar things. They encounter Jesus in ordinary acts of fishing and eating breakfast together. (And although the catch seems quite miraculous, we don't have to read it that way, because in standing from the bank it would be possible to see a huge shawl of fish that is not visible from the bank.) In these ordinary activities, we are reminded of the first time they had met Jesus, when he first called them to leave their nets behind, and become fishers of men. It is as if Jesus is returning to say, "this calling hasn't ended. I'm still calling you to follow me. Even into this risen life."

In these two encounters with the risen Jesus, we see that sometimes the call to follow Jesus is a more dramatic about turn, and sometimes, it is a continuation or deepening of that relationship with God.

For some of us, Paul's account might be more familiar with our journey of Christian faith— a starker change of direction. For others, it might be more like the disciples in the boat— a deepening of previous encounter and pre-existing relationship, but one that is nonetheless changed. Or, for many of us, it might be a bit of both. Times when we are stopped in our tracks by God and realise how blind we have been, as well as times when our call to follow Jesus has been a renewing and reigniting of that familiar spark.

I know I have had experiences of meeting Jesus in both these ordinary and more extraordinary ways. In times when I've been encouraged and sensed God present on the path I'm heading, and at times when I've been confronted, and God has shown me my blindness and need to change direction/repent. To return to our original question, "where do we encounter the risen Jesus

today?" The answer is perhaps both in the everyday and ordinary, as well as in the flash from heaven moments.

But, perhaps more important than the question of "how" or "where" do we meet Jesus? Is rather the question that Paul asks. "Who?" "Who are you, Lord?" Which points to the key that binds all encounters with the Risen Jesus; his invitation into relationship with him.

In both cases, in different ways, he calls those he has encountered to "follow him." Again, this challenge to "follow" can lead us into questions of "how" or "where"? And we are reminded of an earlier passage in John's Gospel where Thomas says to Jesus, "Lord, we do not know where you are going, so how can know the way?" To this, Jesus replies, "I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."

Jesus is not saying I will teach you the way, or I will explain to you the truth, or instruct you on how to "live your best life," as the kids say. But he says *I am*, the way, *I am* the truth, *I am* the life. "I am."

To follow Jesus, we must get to know him. "Who are you Lord?" Paul's question shows he is at the beginning of this journey. The disciples on the other hand were deepening an already existing relationship with Christ: "none of the disciples dared ask him "Who are you? because they knew it was the Lord."

But even in knowing Jesus, this journey is never static or complete. (The Greek for the word disciple is *mathete*, which means student— as disciples we are always learning). There is always greater and greater depths to grasping who Jesus is, that we will never exhaust.

We see this in the beautiful moment between Jesus and Peter, as Jesus affirms his love for Peter three times, in direct counter to Peter's three denials of Jesus during his trial and crucifixion. Afterwards, Jesus says, "Follow me." It's as if Jesus is saying, "Peter, nothing you could say or do can definitively end our relationship. My risen life shows that even death itself cannot separate you from my love. Now you know me even more than before, follow me, still."

And we are given a hint of the martyrdom that Peter himself will face. A reversal of the scared Peter who flees and denies Christ. Being affirmed by

Jesus' love, growing in deeper relationship and trust with him, Peter ends up following Jesus even into death, and through death into risen life.

So, first and foremost this calling to follow Jesus, is an invitation to get to know him! "Who are you Lord?"

In the wake of Easter, as we celebrate the resurrection, we are reminded that Jesus Christ is not dead, but alive. We worship a *Living God*. A God who longs for relationship with us, for us to know him and his love for us.

So, we pray that you would open the eyes and ears of our hearts to show us more and more, *who you are Lord*.

Amen.