

Third Sunday of Easter, All Together Service

"A Second Chance" / Transformation

Acts 9, 1-6, John 21, 1-19

Which of us hasn't, at some time in our lives, however old, or however young we are, wished we could put the clock back and re live a particular moment? Sometimes that's because we have enjoyed something so much we wish we could have it all over again. – the best birthday party, or winning at something. (I do remember in the distant past winning the slow bicycle race at school sports day and just being so proud. I'd still win it now in Chichester I think!) But sometimes, we want to put the clocks back because we feel really guilty or ashamed – we've done or said something we really wish we hadn't. That's when the phrase "I could kick myself" really comes in to its own. If only we could have a second chance, an opportunity to put right the past.

Just take a few moments to think about when you would have like to put the clocks back – i. to re live something you have really enjoyed and ii. to do something

differently because of something you are ashamed about / feel guilty about. Write them on your piece of paper (nobody else is going to see them!)

Now if anyone longed to put the clock back it must surely have been Peter, for he must have been feeling really terrible and guilty about his past mistakes. Remember he denied Jesus, not once or twice, but three times, when he was asked if he knew Jesus. He said he didn't – he let Jesus down really badly. What he wouldn't have given to undo that time – I imagine his face was bright red with shame every time he thought about it.

But suddenly, Jesus appears among the disciples on the beach as they come back from fishing. Remember, this is after his death on the cross, after that terrible time. And Jesus asks Peter, not once, not twice, but *three* times, whether he loves him. I suspect that after a while it dawned on Peter, that by asking him three times whether he loved him, Jesus is offering him the

opportunity to make amends for each of the three times he has denied him – to put the past behind him and start afresh.

Because it's not that we can actually put the clock back as such and, of course, sometimes, in terms of others at least, we have to live with the consequences of our mistakes. But with God the opportunity is always there to move forward from what has been to what shall be. We need only to acknowledge our faults and to be truly sorry, for resurrection, or new life, to begin once again, here and now.

You see, everything is different in the light of Easter – that's what we need to remember. And we see so much of that difference, so much change and transformation in this story:

- In the fishing – the disciples have caught nothing during the night and then suddenly with the arrival of Jesus, this changes – they have a net full of fish.

- In the conversation Peter has with Jesus – which he must have dreaded but which needed to happen – it transforms his denial of Jesus into affirmation of his love and loyalty. It puts him right with Jesus again. Sometimes we need to have those conversations with people, however much we might dread them or find them difficult. It's worth asking ourselves whether we have avoided them when we should face them and if it's not too late to do something about that..
- It's not just Peter's words that change – *he* is changed and his purpose in life. He goes from being Jesus' right hand man – but a bit of a blusterer, who had thought he was ready to die for Jesus, out of a sense of pride and self importance, but found he wasn't. He goes from that to being a man who, because Jesus has laid down his life for him, will in turn lay down his life for Jesus – a man of humility,

humble, the rock of the church, strengthened through the Holy Spirit.

- And look at the transformation of Saul – Paul as we know him - in our first reading this morning. He goes from being the biggest persecutor of the early Church, to being one of its most influential leaders. He was stopped in his tracks by Jesus appearing to him and asking him simply: “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?”

So what do these readings tell us about ourselves and our Church today?

- First, that we all have the mission, the job, of telling other people about Jesus, his love for us all. That's what all those fish caught in the nets represent – that the love of God is for everyone and there are lots of people to tell about this love.
- Secondly it reminds us that we all do wrong things – even Peter - but that God forgives.

Just look at what he forgave Paul. That's why we say sorry and ask for God's forgiveness at the beginning of this service. And when we have that forgiveness, we need to move on - what's important then is that we love God and all those around us – like Peter, we must care for and look after Jesus' lambs and sheep – that's all of us.

So keep that piece of paper – take it home and look at it later today. It's a good reminder of what life is like – full of ups and downs, good and bad. There are times, and there always will be, when we wish we could turn back the clock – sometimes because life is so good, but often because life is so hard and we make mistakes.

But however foolish or wrong we have been we do get another chance if we are truly sorry. Change, new life begins here and now if we are prepared to accept it.

Amen