

Sermon Notes

St Mark's Anglican Church
South Hurstville

Easter 3
22 April 2007

Preacher
The Reverend Chris Albany
Rector

Readings: Acts 9.1-6; Psalm 30; Revelation 5.6-14; John 21.1-19

Doing the same thing isn't always a good thing – an example from fisher-folk!

Many years ago I attended an International Pastoral Care Conference at which a representative of grass-roots Christian Communities in South America gave a series of brief symbolic presentations about their understanding and experience of life and Church. The one from Panama made a deep impression. Here it is.

"This symbolic greeting is a simple red pennant handcrafted by Panamanian Indians. It is dominated by the outline of a fish. In their native language they told us, "Panama means the place of the fish, so we drew this fish on our cloth". In our Christian tradition the fish is a symbol of Jesus but we selected it also because many of us are fishermen and as fishermen we want to tell you about how we experience Church. People who work on the land make paths and sometimes try to cement them. It's easier to walk on them that way. But when we work on the sea we cannot walk on a cement path. We cannot just follow the paths of yesterday because they may not lead us to the fish today. Finding the fish each day means that we must read the signs - the tides, the sun, the shadows, the winds. We have to judge and so we learned also to judge and discern in our basic communities. It is not always important to repeat yesterday's ways. They do not lead to today's fish."

The challenge for us as we reflect on that message and today's Gospel reading is how well are we reading the signs - the issues, the mood, the concerns of our community, nation and world?

The disciples had been fishing all night, no doubt doing what they knew best, trying all the tricks of the trade learnt through years of experience and to no avail.- they caught nothing. And along comes this stranger, though he is no stranger, who presumes to know better and tells them, hardened fisherman, to put the nets down and they catch a great haul of fish. Easter is like that – it's about surprise and life and all its fullness. One wonders whether the disciples think back to that other time Luke recounts in his Gospel when they had been fishing all night and caught nothing and Jesus tells them to let down the net and they catch a great haul so much so that the boats are in danger of sinking. (Or is it really the same event remembered in different ways? For John this is an Easter faith event, and for Luke it's about becoming disciples?) Things are different now – everything's changed. Easter/ resurrection is about being prepared to leave aside the old ways of doing things, of being open to new possibilities and to take new initiatives.

What might be the things that we need change, to do differently in order to find the way to connect meaningfully with the hearts and minds of family, friends, neighbours all those with whom we share our lives and to whom we are called to reach out with the transforming love of Jesus? Not that we change everything, for we might throw out the baby with the bathwater – but if we are realistic we will recognise that whilst we are doing many things well – particularly catering for an older segment of community, who find our style of liturgy and music creative; there are other things don't do so well at all. A particular challenge we have is to grow in our ability to share the essence of Easter life and faith with younger families, adult, teenagers and children. We need to be prepared to move out of our personal and corporate comfort zones – exactly what that means in terms of detail and practicalities I don't know – that's a bit scary – I suspect it means trying new things and being

prepared to fall flat on our faces (to fish all night and catch nothing!)– may well have some monumental failures before we succeed – but not to try will be to have admitted defeat and have sown the seeds of the demise of St Mark’s as a viable community.

I want to ask two things of you today:

1. pray for wisdom and discernment for the way forward that we might read aright the signs, and moods of our culture and local community
2. a commitment to openness to try new and different approaches – a willingness to step outside your comfort zones – Let me offer an example, we tend not to be good about inviting others to share our faith and worship so a small way to begin is by inviting someone who is not a ST Mark’s regular to come and share in our St Mark’s day celebrations in 2 weeks time. NCLS research tells us that the most common reason given for how people became Christians is that someone invited them to church.

Oh and let me add a third thing.

3. Looking for family ministry person – if you think you know anyone who might fill such a position please let me know. There are some job descriptions in the Narthex.

So to finish let me return to that simple message of those Panamanian Christians.

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