

Rocky Road: The Miraculous Catch - Sunday 10th March 2024

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[0 : 00] Good morning St. John's, it's been a little while hasn't it? So how nice to see you all again. So we're continuing the story of Peter on this Rocky Road series. Now while I did play with lots of videos of Diggers, I realised I didn't have a gimmick to start off the Rocky Road series that would match any of the ones recently. So we're going to start just biblically I'm afraid.

We've seen Peter grow from this heady, kind of feisty, young charismatic leader and we're gradually watching him evolve and mature into the leader we see in the early church. A leader who set a path for the church to follow and which most people identify with at some point on his journey of discipleship. I love watching him grow from this young scrappy, well probably quite young, he looks elderly in the video obviously but as Matt said probably quite young scrappy individual into the wise Peter who receives young scrappy Paul and manages him perfectly. So I enjoy watching that and seeing that evolution. Today we're going to look at a passage in the light of the resurrection.

This is Jesus's final resurrection appearance in John's Gospel. We've now passed the aftermath of Jesus's death and Peter's traumatised denial and now Christ is encouraging the disciples to look forward, to turn towards the future and imagine what the future church will be like.

And as Matt said this is the third appearance and he's actually had a one-to-one with Peter which we sadly have no record of and then we've had the meeting with Thomas and now we're on to this one.

So we see this, we see the disciples they've decided to start going fishing. Now they've actually decided to start going fishing at night in the sea of Tiberias. These two things are always significant in John's Gospel because John is one of those writers that uses every single possible angle metaphorical or literal to try and shine light on the awesome truth of Jesus being both fully divine and fully human. So it's dark, it's before dawn and it's significant in John's Gospel because darkness is always associated with uncertainty, with not knowing where you are or where you're up to, not knowing where you're up to about the light who is Christ. And the fact that the disciples have gone fishing at night does suggest that they were all at sea. While they've seen the resurrected Jesus a couple of times, I suspect that they were still processing everything. And in that uncertainty and fear of persecution, what do we do with this man who's come back from the dead? They had returned to something that they know super well, fishing. They'd returned to actually what they did before Jesus came at night. So basically they're in this place of deep uncertainty, they find like we can't sleep, what are we going to do? We're going to go fishing. And maybe they were going fishing because they find it calming. Or maybe they just run out of food. Who knows? Anyway, they mostly seem to go fishing in the day in the Gospels. So it is kind of a bit intriguing that they've decided to go fishing in the middle of the night. Though we do see that a few times. So it's their sense of this being a time of confusion. It's also significant that it takes place on Lake Tiberias. Because that's the same place we see in John 6, where Jesus fed the 5,000. So perhaps the disciples were remembering this amazing miracle and thinking, we want to go back close to there. We want to look for a bit more of that extraordinary abundance which Jesus provided. So with all that context in mind, let's have a look at the clip. Afterwards, Jesus appeared again to his disciples by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way. Simon Peter, Thomas, also known as Didymus, Nathaniel from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

[4 : 07] I'm going out to fish, Simon Peter told them. And they said, we'll go with you. So they went out and got into the boat. But that night they caught nothing.

Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore. But the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. He called out to them, friends, haven't you any fish?

No, they answered. He said, throw your net on the right side of the boat, and you will find some. When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, It is the Lord. As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, It is the Lord, he wrapped his outer garment round him, for he had taken it off and jumped into the water.

The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred meters. When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there, with fish on it and some bread.

[5 : 26] Jesus said to them, Bring some of the fish you have just caught. So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three.

But even with so many, the net was not torn. Jesus said to them, Come and have breakfast. None of the disciples dared ask him, Who are you?

They knew it was the Lord. Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples, after he was raised from the dead.

So a really gorgeous clip there. One of the best stories in the Bible, I think. So firstly, I think we can all identify with the disciples in the clip. They're in a position where their future seems uncertain, where they're driven by fear of being hurt or not being enough, because the challenge looks huge.

What are they going to do with this man who's come back from the dead? And we all go through periods like that all of the time. Times when we feel despair or all at sea, because the future feels up for grabs and that can just be really exhausting.

[6 : 45] And all kinds of things can lead you to feeling like that. Mourning a loss, a failed marriage, feeling like you're out of control of your physical or your mental health, or working really hard and not feeling like you're getting the results that you need, or perhaps financial insecurity.

And the disciples responded like lots of people do, by going back to what they know, by seeking out familiar old routines and getting back into their boats.

Now, we don't know whether that's coming from a place of economic insecurity, running out of food, or because they just found fishing a good way to calm the mind. But we do see them doing their fishing in quite a hopeful place, as I said, on Lake Tiberias, near where Jesus performed one of his most impressive, abundant miracles.

And when Jesus comes back and the disciples have slipped into their familiar routines, into the place where the disciples are feeling uncertain and afraid and not enough, Jesus meets them exactly where they are.

And he kind of comes back to them and says, let's start again by rehashing their original calling story. The one from way back when in Luke 5, before the disciples knew where the road where Jesus would lead them to.

[8 : 07] The story of the calling which Dave was talking about a few weeks ago. And this time, in the post-resurrection experience, when Jesus pipes up to the frustrated fishermen who've been up all night and caught nothing again, just try on the other side of the boat.

The disciples don't push back as much as they did first time. In the first time, when Jesus tells them, just try one more time. In the first calling of Peter, when Peter says, Master, we've worked hard all night and we haven't caught anything, but because you say so, I'll let down the nets again.

It sort of highlights how frustrating it is for Jesus, a non-fisherman, to come and tell them, try again when they've been working so hard all night. And it must have been kind of irritating to hear again, after the disciples had been fishing all night for nothing, to hear Jesus, not a fisherman, come and backseat fish and tell them how to do their job.

But they did it, even if the first time they pushed back a little time. Whereas this second time, Jesus says, try the other side of the boat. And they don't push back. They just try the other side of the boat.

And I think this is an indication that they're open to it. They want to hear Jesus saying, come on, let's go again. They're open to Jesus's call that second time.

[9 : 24] And that tells us how much they've grown over the course of Jesus's ministry. They might have turned away at the resurrection, but they've grown in the trust and knowledge of God. It also says whether they're fishing at night and feeling adrift or not, they're getting ready for the next stretch of the road, a tough piece of life journey that is exciting, but also pretty terrifying, which requires huge faith from all of these disciples, because for most of them, it ends in martyrdom.

And they do follow Christ right to the point of death. I think it's also worth noting that the disciples catch this incredible catch of fish before they recognize Jesus.

It's not payment for getting, noticing things. God always gives with no strings attached. Grace, abundance is meant just as a gift, not as a prize for acing the test.

And I think this story reflects how Jesus, how God reaches out to a lot of us. God comes into our ordinary life, no matter how insecure or scared or adrift we're feeling.

And God meets us in the earthly reality we live in, in the things of daily life. In the chores that feel so routine, they can grind us down. In the small extraordinarinesses of this earthly existence.

[10 : 44] In golden moments and in some tougher ones. And at those times when God meets us, where we are at physically, emotionally, spiritually, God always points us out of our heads in the sand towards extraordinary abundance.

Because God longs for us to thrive, not just to survive. Jesus' appearance on the beach is an amazing example of that.

His appearance is an example of just pure grace, no strings attached. The men haul in their catch before they recognize Jesus. They don't earn it by declaring him Lord. Instead, their blessings are literally beyond belief.

Despite their doubts, their tiredness, their failure, the fact they've been up all night, they follow the directions of the stranger on the beach. And life-giving abundance follows.

That is promised for all of us. And we see them recognizing that. We see Peter recognizing that when he leaps into the water towards Jesus. As soon as he knows where Jesus is, he's like, I'm going to be there.

[11 : 48] Just like perhaps when he was walking across the water, he leaps out of the boat. Now, it is a bit strange that he decides to get dressed before leaping out into the water, but that's for another day. And I guess this calling story is how it's been in my life too.

There are moments where I lose the golden thread of dawn light, where I feel thrown off by pain or loss or fear, and I put my head in the sand and I try and ignore my God and my calling.

And in all of these moments, I find God just quietly meet me where we are, I am, and nudge me back in the direction that I'm called to be in, back towards the person I was born to.

God calms the small voices that send me adrift and the fears that ask if I'm willing to surrender and asks if I'm willing to give those inner voices up to God.

God doesn't just take them away. You have to be willing to give them to God. And sometimes I'm like, no, I'm going to keep that little inner critic for me. Thank you very much. That's my company for today, which is unhealthy.

[12 : 51] And I advise against doing that. I think this story is also really clearly seen in the calling of Nathanael. Nathanael's such an interesting one because Nathanael's only named twice in John's gospel, at the very start at Peter's calling and at the end.

Nathanael is hardly a central character in Jesus's band of disciples, or he isn't as far as we know. Maybe he was the life and soul of the party, but it's not written down. So if there is likely a reason that Nathanael is named here.

In chapter one, Philip invited Nathanael to meet Jesus saying, we found the one in whom Moses and the law and the prophets wrote, Jesus, son of Joseph from Nazareth.

And despite Nathanael's slightly cynical comment, can anything good come out of Nazareth? He does decide to check Jesus out. As he approaches the man from Nazareth, Nathanael hears Jesus address him and says, here truly is an Israelite in which there is no deceit.

And Nathanael's stunned. Jesus is a complete stranger. And yet Nathanael is known by him, fully, deeply known, right down to the deep recesses of his heart. And this prompts Nathanael to say, Rabbi, you are the son of God.

[14 : 05] You are the king of Israel. Let's have a look at Nathanael's calling story while we're here. The next day, Jesus decided to leave for Galilee.

Finding Philip, he said to him, follow me. Philip, like Andrew and Peter, was from the town of Bethsaida. Philip found Nathanael and told him, we have found the one Moses wrote about in the law and about whom the prophets also wrote, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

Nazareth? Can anything good come from there? Nathanael asked. Come and see, said Philip. When Jesus saw Nathanael approaching, he said of him, here truly is an Israelite in whom there is no deceit.

How do you know me? Nathanael asked. Jesus answered, I saw you while you were still under the fig tree before Philip called you. Then Nathanael declared, Rabbi, you are the son of God.

You are the king of Israel. Jesus said, you believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things than that.

[15 : 26] He then added, very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man. And as ever, there's loads to say about Nathanael, about the fig tree, about the fact that he seems to be anticipating the Messiah and studying the scriptures, but we're just going to pick up on the fact that Nathanael's experience shows that while it's possible not to know Jesus oneself, Jesus, God, will always fully know you.

In Nathanael's case, as with Mary Magdalene outside the empty tomb in 2016, recognition by Jesus leads to recognition of Jesus. Similarly, the disciples don't recognize Jesus on the shore, but when he addresses them, when he addresses them tenderly, calling them children, and when their empty nets strain with an extraordinary catch, recognition follows.

There's a certain abundant grace that flows from being fully known by another. And how is this grace magnified when we recognize that we are fully known by God? And what a gift it is to be known by God.

All those things you think you might hide, the parts of you you don't even know yet, or you feel ashamed of, those parts are known by God. You don't have to hide anything.

In fact, you can't. You can't hide anything or put a face on because God knows you and loves you completely, exactly as you are. God chooses you and loves you as a child, even and especially knowing your flaws, as well as your gifts, your best and your worst parts of yourself, your limitations and your challenges.

[17 : 12] God made you with those limitations and challenges, sees you and meets you as you are and calls you into being yourself more completely, into abundance. That's grace and what a gift it is.

A gift we see in the life of Peter. A gift we see in all those who meet with Christ, in all of God's loved children. So with this in mind, I guess I was thinking a bit about roads.

Not Roman roads which cut through mountains and valleys built out of smooth paving stones on the backs of and with the blood of slaves. That's the only way those roads are possible.

But more ordinary roads, ancient roads. Rocky roads, if you like. roads with huge rocks and boulders make for an uncomfortable journey.

Whereas roads where you have less rocks to step up on make an easier path. The best roads start with big rocks at the bottom to allow for good drainage so they don't become really horrible and sloppy and stability.

[18 : 19] And then they have smaller rocks which are easier to traverse on top. And perhaps, like Peter, that's what we're doing with our lives. We're gradually journeying on these roads.

Roads others, like Peter, have started for us. And as we go, we're called by God towards heaven, towards abundance. Called towards God on this path of the church.

And gradually, as we go, perhaps we just add a few smaller rocks to make the path a bit smoother for those who will come after us. And perhaps, the best thing we can do is ensure that there isn't something to trip up those who come next as we journey along ourselves.

Make sure there aren't any big rocks in the path of the little ones. Like Peter, one of the first on the road, there will always be hiccups. But each person who walks along helps others to find and follow the road.

And like the disciples that journey, journeying sometimes does involve feeling lost and floundering sometimes. But in this passage, we see God's promise that God will not leave us adrift.

[19 : 28] God will meet us in his son and point us towards home, towards abundance, towards growing into the people God is calling us to be. And those people ultimately are ourselves, ourselves being ourselves completely.

God chose us and knows us and wants us warts and all and loves us as his children completely. We can trust the road, we know where it's going and the God who calls us sends us and also journeys with us, reminding us of where we're going.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Yes. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen.