



### Opening Responses for Eastertide

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
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### 'Starter for Ten' Discussion Question

Recall a time when you have forgiven somebody else who had done you real harm. What enabled you to do this?

### Prayers of Thanks and Praise

Glory to you, O God:  
your raised Jesus from the grave,  
bringing us victory over death and giving us eternal life.

Glory to you, O Christ:  
for us and for our salvation you overcame death,  
and opened the gate to everlasting life.

Glory to you, O Holy Spirit:  
you lead us into the truth, show us the way,  
and breathe new life into us.

**Glory to you, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
now and forever. Amen**

### Psalm of the Week – Psalm 30 (StF 808)

I will exalt you, O Lord, because you have raised me up  
**and have not let my foes triumph over me.**

O Lord my God, I cried out to you  
**and you have healed me.**

You brought me up, O Lord, from the dead;  
**you restored me to life  
from among those that go down to the pit.**

Sing to the Lord, you servants of his;  
**give thanks to his holy name.**

For his wrath endures but the twinkling of an eye,  
his favour for a lifetime.

**Heaviness may endure for a night,  
but joy comes in the morning.**

In my prosperity I said, 'I shall never be moved.

**You, Lord, of your goodness,  
have made my hill so strong.'**

Then you hid your face from me  
**and I was utterly dismayed.**

To you, O Lord, I cried;

**to the Lord I made my supplication:**

'What profit is there in my blood, if I go down to the Pit?

**Will the dust praise you or declare your faithfulness?**

'Hear, O Lord, and have mercy upon me;

**O Lord, be my helper.'**

You have turned my mourning into dancing;

**you have put off my sackcloth  
and girded me with gladness;**

Therefore, my heart sings to you without ceasing;  
**O Lord my God, I will give you thanks for ever.**  
Glory to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit;  
**as it was in the beginning, is now, and shall be forever.**  
**Amen**

### Prayers of Renewal

Jesus Christ is risen from the dead,  
opening the way to everlasting life,  
both in the here-and-now, and throughout all that is to come.  
Let us therefore bring to God those things in need of renewal:

We bring to you those things for which we are sorry:

**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the times we've failed to love one another:

**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the burdens we carry and sorrows we bear:

**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the injustices and oppression in our world:

**Restore us and heal us.**

We bring to you the failings and disunity of your Church:

**Restore us and heal us.**

*Silence is kept for a few moments...*

God of new beginnings,  
of love stronger than even death,  
you set us free from the past, to flourish in the future.  
Thank you that you forgive us, restore us,  
and breathe new life into us.

**Amen**

**Reading** John 21:1 – 19

### Sermon

Around three-and-a-half years ago, my mother became seriously ill before Christmas, and at points it genuinely was touch and go as to whether she would make it to Christmas Day. The whole experience brought back painful memories of the stroke which put her into such a vulnerable state in the first place – it felt like everything was turned upside down. While I am not sure it was the best outcome, because of the impact on my mum's already severely limited quality of life, in the end she was discharged from hospital, and thus I returned home to complete the cycle of Advent and Christmas services. Something that helped me when I got back here was everything being relatively normal, so that I wasn't constantly being reminded of mum. Keeping things as ordinary as possible, and getting on with our everyday life, can be quite cathartic after we've been through a difficult time. Thus, the start of today's passage makes sense to me. After the traumatic experiences of Maundy Thursday and Good Friday and the surprise and shock of that first Easter morning, Peter had gotten to that stage of needing to do something 'ordinary' just to stay sane.

When he suggested going fishing, the disciples who were there with him – Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and two anonymous others – jumped at the chance and got into the boat. However, a hard night of grafting in the familiar waters of the Sea of Galilee yielded nothing to show for it. Perhaps, on one level, that wasn't the point. Yet, I still find myself wondering what was running through their minds as they went about trying, and failing, to catch some fish. A few months after my mum had her stroke, I remember walking past a charity shop for the Stroke Association, and suddenly feeling a weird emptiness, like there was a 'hole' in my psyche, where mum should've been. It was as if there was this piece of the jigsaw of my life that was too far lost down the back of the sofa to be retrieved, and it felt very odd indeed.

Reading this text, I can't help wondering if the disciples experienced something similar; after all, Jesus spent plenty of time in their boats, and some of their most powerful memories of him were made on or around the Sea of Galilee (which is also called the Sea of Tiberius).

What happened next contains powerful echoes of Peter's calling as told in Luke 5:1 – 11, to the point where I suspect Luke's version of those events was based on a post-resurrection encounter. Whether or not that is the case, there's clearly something here about listening out for what God wants us to do, rather than scrambling around and trying to do everything our own way. Having caught nothing all night, it's when Peter and company listened to that mysterious figure upon the shore that they caught so many fish they couldn't draw their nets back in. The Beloved Disciple – who was most likely John – was the first to figure out that this was Jesus, and when he told Simon Peter, the latter made himself decent and jumped into the water. It reminds me of another resurrection story, where Jesus was recognised amid the familiar and ordinary. This also involved food, as Jesus blessed, broke and shared bread around that kitchen table in Emmaus (Luke 24:31). Where might God be within our everyday experiences?

When they made it to shore, the disciples found Jesus sat beside a charcoal fire, with fish and bread cooking on it. That cold night when Peter denied Jesus three times, there'd been a charcoal fire burning in the courtyard. Peter had sat by it, listening to his friend being tried by the Chief Priests. On that particular occasion, he had not exactly given the best account of himself, having rejected any claim that he was with Jesus when challenged by other 'listeners in'. Perhaps the symbolism didn't hit him immediately, occupied as he was with their bumper catch of exactly one-hundred-and-fifty-three fish. However, when Peter and the others sat down to breakfast, I imagine that this connections with Maundy Thursday would have come right back to him. What must that have felt like? Pretty unsettling, I would think...

Now, John tells us this was the third time which Jesus had appeared to his disciples, and yet verse twelve states they were too scared to ask him who he was – although they already knew anyway. It forms one of those odd details in the resurrection stories, and reminds us that Jesus's post-resurrection appearance must have been in some sense different to how things had been before. We don't even know to what extent the fish and bread were actually needed by Jesus as food, though they do serve to show that the disciples weren't seeing a ghost, or having some sort of collective hallucination. What we do know, however, is that none of their massive catch of fish was eaten that morning. Just as Jesus did not actually need to cook what Peter had caught, I wonder if we are sometimes guilty of getting ourselves all in a muddle when we think about mission, acting as if the burden of building the kingdom of God is all upon our shoulders. Thank God that Jesus is sovereign, and is at work within our world before we've even shown up! Our job, simply put, is to look out for where the Holy Spirit's already working, roll up our sleeves and join in.

After breakfast came possibly the most powerful conversation in all the New Testament. Some wounds run too deep for the resurrection in of itself to heal, and God's gentle heart-work is needed to release us into newness of life. My experience has been that there is simply no short-cutting the grieving process, no 'get out of jail free' card we can play to avoid dealing with the pains of losing somebody we love, or having to grapple with major life-changes, for example. For Peter, forgiveness came with a task to do – "feed my sheep" – that enabled this impetuous, passionate and complex disciple to go from strength to strength, and grow into that person Jesus recognised long before any of the events of Holy Week. Yet, to really heal that wound, Peter had to revisit that horribly painful night. Each one of his denials was met with grace, love and a calling: go and truly live. What struck me, looking at this passage afresh, was that Jesus uses Peter's original name – Simon. Perhaps this is actually the point – going back to the

beginning, grounding everything in love, and then being able to say 'yes' when asked once again to follow Jesus.

There's so much one could say in relation to this passage, but you'll be glad to hear that I'm going to restrict myself to three thoughts for you to ponder in the coming week. Firstly, the disciples experienced a change in their fortunes when they listened to what Jesus needed them to do, rather than insisting upon doing things in their own way, however familiar and 'safe' that felt. Are we rooting our discipleship, both individually and corporately, sufficiently in prayer and listening to God? Our thoughts and plans for the future will not be all they are 'cracked up to be' if not based on prayerful and careful discernment, and that takes time.

Secondly, as we noted earlier, the burdens of building the Kingdom of God don't fall solely upon our shoulders, and our God goes ahead of us in mission, sowing seeds of grace. From its earliest days, one of the key understandings that has shaped Methodism is that God's grace goes before us, meaning we're in a relationship with God long before we know it. That should give us a degree of confidence while we explore what mission might look like in our context, as we're not stepping into the unknown, but following in the footsteps of a faithful God. Now, that does not mean that life will necessarily be easy, and it is worth noting that within the latter verses of today's passage, the stark reality was made clear to Peter that following Jesus would still be costly and challenging. The same is true for us, today – what are we prepared to let go of, as we are led where we must go?

Thirdly, the shame of Peter's threefold denial was met by Jesus with a calling to a threefold affirmation of Love. However falteringly Peter managed to put this into practice, the foundation of all that he would later accomplish was his love for Jesus. Are we people whose main motivation is love for God, and in turn, love for neighbours? If Jesus were to ask us the same question, "Do you love me?", could we say

with honesty, "You know I love you"? If you should take nothing else away from today, that's the key question to explore. God calls us to fish for people, but this needs to flow from an authentic love, in order to make the difference in the world that it is ours to make. So, let us pray that love may be at the heart of all we are and do. Amen

### **Recommended Resource of the Week**

Tod Bolsinger's *Canoeing the Mountains – Christian Leadership in Uncharted Territory* (2015) looks at mission in a changing world like that of Peter and friends.

### **Prayers of Intercession**

#### **Lord's Prayer**

#### **Final Prayer – Collect for the Third Sunday of Easter**

Risen Christ,  
you filled your disciples with boldness and fresh hope:  
strengthen us to proclaim your risen life,  
and fill us with your peace,  
to the glory of God the Father. **Amen**

### **Blessing**

Alleluia! Christ is risen!  
**He is risen indeed. Alleluia!**

May the blessing of God,  
the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit,  
fill us with resurrection hope,  
and remain upon us and all whom we love and pray for,  
now and throughout eternity. **Amen**