Cheadle Hulme Methodist church May 31st 2015 10.0am

Sermon ***John 21: 1-17 – 22***

Prayer. Lord, open our minds and our hearts to hear you, and to respond. Amen

I wonder what you think about Peter the disciple? I think he must have been one of those loveable but irritating people who tended to open his mouth and put his foot in it! But you can't help warming to him because he seems so *real.*

But never more real than when he stood in the courtyard during the trial of Jesus, and said very clearly, 3 times, that he did not know Jesus!

But I wonder, what would we have done, what would I have done in such a situation? Jesus was about to lose his life. People who knew Jesus, who followed him, could be rounded up any time, and suffer the same fate. Just as in many countries today, where simply acknowledging Jesus is a risky business. So maybe we should not be too hard on Peter.

We've just sung, 'in my helplessness you heard my cry, and waves of mercy poured down on my life'.

In the passage Eric has read for us, we hear about Peter being restored and commissed by the Jesus he had denied. It was as if waves of mercy poured down on his life! Peter was carrying a great burden and Jesus lifted it from him. Imagine just how vulnerable and helpless and ashamed Peter must have been feeling. He had spent 3 years with Jesus, followed him, loved him, listened to him, watched him – on one occasion he had even declared with great insight that Jesus was the Messiah! And then, when Jesus was facing hostility, accusations, and death, Peter in his cowardice, denied three times that he even knew him!

And it seems that nothing was ever said about it. But Peter knew what he had done, and Jesus knew, and Peter knew that Jesus knew, and Jesus knew that Peter knew that Jesus knew! for we read that Jesus looked sadly at Peter there in that fateful courtyard of the high priest.

But what a change occurred that day, by the lake, when the disciples had been fishing. How grateful Peter must have been for those waves of mercy which poured down on his life, as Jesus spoke directly to him, forgave him and commissioned him.

Last week we celebrated Pentecost, when the Spirit of God first descended on thousands of people at once.That was when Peter came out of hiding, found his voice, and preached fearlesslessly about Jesus.

It might be a bit confusing, because today we are going back to before Pentecost. As a church we are studying the 40 days with Jesus, the 40 days between his resurrection and pentecost. But we are covering those 40 days in 80 days, so things get a bit out of step with the church year. All the incidents of the 40 days in this series are pre Pentecost.

Let's have a look at John 21. At the beginning of the chapter, Peter is at a loose end, doesn't quite know what to do with himself.

By now, he has met the risen Jesus twice, along with the other disciples. (John 20) The first occasion was on Easter Sun evening and then again the week after, when Thomas had his moving encounter with Jesus.

And throughout these days, in Peter's mind must have been the knowledge that at Jesus' hour of deepest need, Peter had let him down. As far as we know, no one spoke about it. It must have been a heavy burden for Peter to carry.

I wonder, have we ever done something that we are so ashamed of that we have difficulty living with ourselves? Something that makes us squirm when we think of it?

Moses must have felt a bit like that when it became known that he had killed the Egyptian and then run away.

I have just read a book, called The Prodigal'. The title is meant to remind us of the parable Jesus told about the prodigal son who left home, led a riotous life and returned with his tail between his legs, as it were, to be met by a forgiving and joyful father.

The Prodigal is the fictional story of Jack Chisholm, a minister in Seattle. (Which reminds me that when one of our ministers came on an exchange from Seattle to Cheadle, he thought he was coming to Cheeeadle! But that wasn't this man in the story.)

Jack Chisholm had built up a mega church, with thousands of people attending Sunday by Sunday; the service was videoed simultaneously to the two other church campuses, and was beamed on live TV and on the church's webcam. Jack was a successful pastor. And his mantra, the words he declared week by week, were, We must do better!

One week Jack went with a group from his church to Mexico to see what could be done to support the widows and orphans who had been impacted by drug trafficing. A worthy enterprise. But when his plane was delayed in Mexico, he and Sally his pretty assistant became totally drunk, and slept together. Jack was horrified when he realised what had happened. He wanted to deny it, then suggested that if they didn't mention it no one would know. But another guest at the hotel had a photo of him, clearly drunk and embracing Sally. The photo went viral. On his return the church elders gave him the opportunity to admit to the church what he had done, apologise, take an extended leave, and maybe eventually return. But Jack denied that the photo was of him, refused to apologise, and was immediately sacked from the church he had established.

Jack ran away, as Moses did, and Jack drowned his sorrows for a few weeks. Until Christmas day, when his estranged father turned up and took him home to Mayfield in Texas. From there, safe with his father, his restoration to self respect and a new relationship with God began. More about Jack Chisholm in a couple of minutes.

Back to Peter. He ran away to what was familiar, in his case, fishing. But after they had been fishing all night – the best time to fish – they had caught nothing. How despondent they must have been.

Then Jesus appeared on the shore. He asked them if they had caught anything. Not a thing, they answered, v5.

Jesus instructed them to put their nets at the right side of the boat – and would you believe it - a huge catch of fish!

Does it sound familiar? It had happened before. Perhaps it was the recollection of a similar event when they had first encountered Jesus that made John realise. This man on the shore, telling them where the fish were, was Jesus himself!

So when John said, 'it's the Lord', Peter the impetuous jumped out of the boat and swam ashore, leaving the others to haul the fish in! From being at a very low ebb, Peter is excited and active!

What can we take from this? ***Jesus helps in time of trouble***

He helped Peter and the other disciples by pointing out where the fish were.

He helped Jack Chisholm by sending Jack's father to rescue him from despair.

God helped Moses eventually to become a great leader.

He helps us when we struggle, whether our struggle is with illhealth, disappointment, relationships, the pressure of work, caring for a sick relative or living with an unruly teenager. Jesus is there for us, offering help.

And like the disciples, ***we can accept his help.***  Or not. We have a choice.

Like the disciples, we can ***obey his instructions*** Or not.

If the disciples had said, as they did once before, we've tried all night and caught nothing, so what's the point? Then they would not have caught the fish. They had a choice. That previous time, begrudgingly, they did what the man on the shore said – and they caught fish. This time, it seems they took his word for it immediately.

So what about us? Do we take the Christian life seriously? Do we take Jesus seriously? Do we do what he says, follow his ways, live as he wants us to live? Or is our Christian faith an add-on, a hobby, something we take up and put down as we fancy? Do we demonstrate the good news of Jesus by our words and our lives?

*Jesus helps as we do this*. But like those first disciples, like Jack Chisholm, like Moses, we need first to accept his help, then obey his instructions if that help is to be effective.

*Jack Chisholm* refused the offer of help from his church elders. Only when he was at his lowest point, and his father came to find him, did he accept any help. And later, he let God back into his life, but on God's terms, not his own.

In John 21, Jesus invited the disciples to have breakfast with him.

The invitation *to us* is not just for breakfast, but to let him into our whole lives, to transform us, give us purpose and the power of his Spirit.

Like the disciples, we can ***accept his invitation***

Jesus had breakfast *ready* for them. He had fish, and bread, but v 10, he graciously asked them to bring some of their fish. He wanted their cooperation in order to feed them.

And he was cooking on a charcoal fire.

The other time we read about a charcoal fire is in John 18:18, where Peter was sitting by a charcoal fire warming himself, when he denied that he knew Jesus.

So having been despondent, and gone fishing, then elated when he knew Jesus was there, he would now be feeling pretty ashamed, as he remembered that other charcoal fire.

Jesus knew all about the significance for Peter of the charcoal fire.

And he gave Peter the opportunity to regain his self respect, his relationship with Jesus, and he gave him purpose.

Because ***Jesus heals us from our past failings***

3 times he asked Peter if he loved him. Three times, to parallel the 3 denials by the charcoal fire in the courtyard.

There's no point hiding from our failures. There's no point pretending we have never got things wrong, sometimes badly wrong. There's no point in running away. Jesus wants to heal us from the shame of our past failings, to forgive us, restore us. And he will, if we let him.

Read John 21:15, 16, 17.

No rebuke here. No blame offered. No, ' You let me down at my hour of deepest need. You denied that you even knew me! I cannot trust you. ' Rather, Jesus offered forgiveness, restoration and commissioning.

And humbling though it must have been for Peter to be required to declare his love for Jesus not once but 3 times, that was what Peter needed just then. He needed to affirm his commitment, and only then was he healed from his past failings.

Not only that, but Jesus commissioned Peter. Feed my sheep, feed my lambs. In other words, look after my people, preach the gospel, establish churches, teach them about me!

And for Peter, that was the ultimate healing – he was being trusted to work for Jesus.

From being disconsolate and disheartened, ashamed and without direction, Peter was relieved, knew he was acceptedand forgiven, and had a purpose in life. He overcame failure, with the help of Jesus.

Jack Chisholm went to work in his father's hardware store. Jack accepted help, he obeyed instructions, he accepted the gracious invitation from the father he had cruelly rejected for 10 years.

And gradually, as he found that he was accepted, he realised that God accepted him too. He did not have to strive, he did not have to try harder – he was accepted and forgiven, because of Jesus. He overcame failure only with the help of Jesus. Read the book! It's well written, and gripping.

In summary, we see that *Jesus helps us when we struggle.*

And we *can accept his offer of help*, we can *obey his instructions*, and *accept his invitation* to share our lives with him as he shares his life with us.

And as with Peter, J*esus helps* ***us*** *overcome our past failings.* When we are truly sorry, admit our mistakes, ask for forgiveness, Jesus forgives us, restores us and gives us a fresh start. This is not just good news, but the best news in the world!

And like Peter, we have a commission, to share the good news of Jesus by our words and through our lives so that others may know forgiveness and new life in him.

Let us pray.