

Reflection of the Gospel-Easter 3C (John 21:1-19)

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Simon Peter has a higher profile in this final chapter of John's gospel than in the first twenty chapters. It is as though the author responsible for the final edition of John's gospel wants to bring Peter to prominence in line with the traditions found in the other gospels. In the previous chapter, it is not at all clear that Peter has come to resurrection faith, while there is no such doubt about the faith of Mary of Magdala. It is she who receives the first resurrection appearance in this gospel. She is also commissioned to proclaim the news of the resurrection to the other disciples. In John 21, Mary Magdalene and the women disciples who have featured so significantly in other parts of John are curiously absent from the closing scenes of the gospel. The focus is clearly on Peter, his role as leader, and his relationship with Jesus.

Peter announces that he intends to go fishing and several of the other disciples join him. They catch nothing. At dawn, they see the figure of Jesus on the shore. As in some of the other resurrection stories, his disciples, with the exception of the "beloved disciple", do not recognise him immediately. They follow his instructions and find themselves overwhelmed with their catch. At the invitation of Jesus, they breakfast on bread and fish. This provides the setting for the rehabilitation of Peter and for his three-fold profession of love of Jesus in the wake of his three-fold denial.

While this passage is filled with symbolism, we might pause to appreciate the materiality underlying the symbols. There are eucharistic overtones in the bread and fish, and in Jesus' action of taking the bread and giving it to the disciples. Sheep and shepherding are key symbols in John where Jesus identifies himself as the "good shepherd". Fishing is an important gospel metaphor for ministry. The number of fish (153) probably denotes the totality or universality of the mission. The untorn net is a symbol of unity, like the seamless garment in the passion narrative. The verb "to draw" has several layers of meaning in this fishing context: the disciples were not able "to *draw* in the net....so Simon Peter went aboard and *drew* the net ashore". These statements evoke earlier sayings of Jesus, particularly his words on the cross, "And I if I am lifted up from the earth will draw *all* to myself" (12:32). The "all" allows for the whole Earth community, and not only the human community, to be drawn to the crucified and resurrected One.

As we reflect on this gospel reading, we might simply listen, as flawed individuals and as church, to Jesus' question: "Do you love me?" Peter's example reminds us that a wholehearted response is possible despite the failures of the past.