

Peter's story: a reflection for Holy Week and Easter

by Clare Masters

PART 2

You readers/listeners of course know how the story pans out. For me, Peter, the misery of my smoky treachery in the early hours of Friday morning hurt so much I thought that day couldn't get any worse. But it did. The crisis of Jesus's night time arrest hurtled into the horrors of a Good Friday execution, and then the despair of grief.

But then comes Easter day, with the shock and joy of Jesus' resurrection, which jolts us out of the numbness of bereavement into the almost incomprehensible world of new hope. It's wonderful, brilliant: Jesus is alive. Well, it's wonderful and brilliant for the *others*. For me, swirled in with the joy, is the memory of that last time Jesus had met my gaze, the acrid smell of the charcoal fire in the courtyard, and then the chill in my soul as I stumbled away in shame. Because I'd failed him, denied I even knew him.

We gather late one evening in a little group on the shore of Lake Galilee – Jack, Jim, me and the others – back where it all began, where we first met Jesus... watching the waves lapping the hulls of the fishing boats, breathing in the smell of the nets, thinking back to the old days. Wonderful as it is to know that Jesus is alive, I still doubt that things can ever be as good again. I let Jesus down when he needed me most. Maybe Jesus won't want me now. Maybe I'd better go back to what I used to do. Simon the fisherman. The old life. No more of this Peter the disciple stuff. So I say, "I'm going fishing".

And quick as a flash, the others respond: "Ah, yes, good idea, we know where we are with fish, we're the experts, come on let's get the boat sorted..." So off we float, into the night. And in the darkness, hauling on the fishing nets, I try to find satisfaction and fulfilment in a familiar old way of life. But, over and over again, the nets return empty.

As dawn breaks, we head back glumly to the shore. Someone is on the beach, with a little barbecue fire going, the smell of grilled fish and freshly baked bread wafting deliciously into the air. "Try throwing your nets out on the right," calls the man. We exchange glances, and Jim definitely rolls his eyes, but we feebly sling the nets back into the glinting water. Jack squints at the shore... and then a little smile begins to creep across his face.

There's something wonderfully *deja vu* about all this. Suddenly I recognise the man on the beach. It's Jesus! As the crew rush to haul in the catch that is now veritably leaping into our nets, I scramble out of the boat and splash ahead to the beach. Part natural impetuosity, part over-cheerful bravado.

And after we have shared breakfast, as the group chatter together, Jesus catches my eye and beckons me to stroll with him along the shoreline away from the others. My heart thumps. Wisps of charcoal smoke drifting along from the beach bonfire sear into my lungs and my memory.

And then, right there on the beach, Jesus gently but firmly does some cardiac surgery, mending my broken heart.

“Simon, Son of John, do you love me more than these?”

He calls me by my old name: Simon, the fisherman, John’s son. Almost as if he was meeting me for the first time. I don’t have to pretend that I’m Peter, the Distinguished Disciple, the Rock.

I look round at the old fishing stuff and the happy bunch of disciples behind them, and answer: “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.”

“Great,” says Jesus. “You’re forgiven. You’re in, you’re part of this team. Feed my lambs. I have a role that only you can fulfil in my church.”

There’s a little pause.

“Simon, Son of John, do you love me?”

Ah, perhaps this going to be rather more of a grilling after all. “Yes, Lord, you know that I love you,” I answer.

“Good,” says Jesus. “Just making doubly sure. *I’m* sure, just checking that *you’re* sure. Because you’re the man I want to take care of my sheep, my church.”

Another tiny, tiny pause.

“Simon, Son of John, do you love me?”

Well, now I don’t know what to say. I love Jesus so much and I want to follow him, but I know I’m a rubbish disciple, and what’s worse, I know Jesus knows all that too. Being asked for a third time is just so painful. But I answer anyway. “Lord, you know everything, you know that I love you.”

“Excellent,” says Jesus. “That’s sorted then. Feed my sheep. You’re in charge of looking after Team Church.”

Jesus has made me answer three times. “Yes Lord, you know I love you”. A triple repair for the triple failure. I’ve never heard of triple bypass surgery, but you get my drift.

Jesus has given me a brand new start. Forgiven. Restored. Very gently but very firmly and very clearly. The charcoal fire on the beach has gone out. The wind has blown the last traces of smoke away and the air I breathe into my lungs at the shoreline is clean and fresh.

I’m Peter again. Time to get on with strengthening my brothers.