

SERMON PREACHED AT SJH EASTER 3 1 MAY 2022; MASS WITH BAPTISM

It's lovely to welcome Tylen, his sisters Peyton and Alexa-Rose, his parents Abigail and Simon and the rest of the baptism party to church this morning. As I said when visiting them, the Easter season is a very appropriate time for christening because of the ceremony's links to death and resurrection. We die to sin and rise into God's life, made possible by Jesus' death for our sins and God raising him to life. You see this most clearly in baptism by total immersion: the candidate goes down into the water and then comes back up. I shall just be pouring water onto Tylen's head today.

Both today's readings are about resurrection appearances of Jesus. The first we heard was to Saul, a devout Jew who thought he was doing God's work by arresting followers of Jesus. On the road to Damascus he saw a blinding light and Jesus spoke to him. "Go into the city," Jesus said, "And you will be told what you are to do." If we read on from today's passage we find that he went into Damascus. After three days he was baptised and called by God to spread the Christian faith around the Mediterranean world. He changed one letter in his name and became Paul. A persecutor of the church became one of its greatest evangelists.

"You will be told what you are to do." That's what happened to the seven disciples in today's reading from the last chapter of S. John's gospel. Jesus gives them three instructions. The first is to cast their net to the right side of the boat. Despite having caught nothing all night they make a huge catch. It reminds us of Jesus' words when he called Simon Peter years before to leave his work as a fisherman and follow him: "From now on you will be catching people." This is a call to all who are baptised. Encouraging others to follow Christ doesn't have to involve aggressive evangelism: it's about faithfulness, love and service, and being honest that our faith plays an important part in our lives.

Then Jesus, who is cooking bread and fish on a fire beside the lake, invites the disciples to contribute some of their catch to what he is preparing. "Bring some of the fish you have just caught." Jesus invites us to join in his work. We bring our unique gifts to the way we serve him. That is true for Tylen and for all of us. Tylen is being welcomed into the family of the church where everyone matters and everyone brings his or her particular contribution. But we're joining something that is already happening: there was food being cooked before the disciples added theirs.

The third thing Jesus says is, "Come and have breakfast." It's remarkable how many times the gospels tell us about Jesus sharing meals with people. He ate with tax collectors and sinners, for

which he was criticised. He ate with Pharisees. He ate with friends. He fed the five thousand with loaves and fish – parallels with today's meal. After rising from the dead he broke bread with two disciples at a house in the village of Emmaus. And of course there was the last supper the night before he died. He gave the bread and wine new meanings: his body which would be broken on the cross and his blood which would be shed. He commanded his disciples to do this in remembrance of him. So that's what we do every Sunday. Jesus invites us today to come and have a meal. We call it the Mass, or the Eucharist, or Communion – different words but the same meaning here. It is the meal of God's family on earth, and all are welcome.

Many families know the value of gathering round a single table to eat – maybe in the evening, or for Sunday lunch. Each member brings something unique – what he or she has done during the day, perhaps. The meal is so much more than just getting the food eaten. It's a strengthening of the family in the love they have for each other and that's part of God's love. I hope Tylen and all of us will know we live in God's love. Jesus is present as we go about our daily business, just as he came to the disciples as they were fishing, the former occupation of several of them. Like the disciples, we may not recognise him at first, but he is with us! He is risen indeed!