

Third Sunday of Easter

Linda Sharpin, Ordinand

Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> May 2025

John 21:1-19

(Also Acts 9:1-6 and 7-20, or Zephaniah 3:14-end, Psalm 30 and Revelation 5:11-end)

May I speak in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Today, I thought we could take a look at a picture I came across when considering this morning's gospel reading. You should have been given a copy together with your worship sheets when you came in. It is an oil painting by a 20<sup>th</sup> century artist called John Reilly, which I think is a beautiful reflection of how God loves us like a parent. Please take a look at it.



At a first glance perhaps you see Jesus, some disciples in a boat, and the impression of some fish caught in a net.

I wonder if you also see the Trinity. With the radiant sun, right in the centre of the picture representing God, expressing the enormity of His love: God the Son in the outstretched arms of Jesus: and God the Holy Spirit, everywhere, but especially in the fish pouring out from Jesus and around into the hearts and minds of the disciples, then circling through the sky round the sun and all the way back to Jesus.

I wonder if the people in the boat, perhaps tossed about by the pressures of life, might also represent ourselves, looking to Jesus, who is showing us the tender love of a parent?

Or perhaps you see the fish as God's people, us, caught in God's unbreakable net of love?

I often think that God's love for us is like the love that a parent has for their children. This love is infinite. The love for an only child is not halved if a second comes along. Nor does it stop when someone is with us no more. We have a glimpse of the enormity of God's love for us through the fish caught in a fishing net. Unlike when Jesus called His first disciples, this net does not break. Like love, it just keeps on expanding. It represents the house of God, and Jesus' call to His disciples to gather people into his church.

God, like a parent, **forgives**: like when, in Luke, (and why wouldn't I choose Luke?) a sinful woman bathed Jesus' feet in her tears and wiped them with her hair. He even forgave Judas Iscariot after his betrayal.

Parents **feed** their children, and here we see Jesus with fish on the bbq and bread at the ready, ready to nurture and sustain His children, both physically and spiritually, building them up to be strong and ready to go out and be 'fishers of people'.

Jesus, like a parent, **prepares** Peter, and the people of the day, for his destiny. He prepares Peter to be the first father on earth of the church after His ascension. Peter's name pivots on this fledging from Simon Peter to Peter, arguably the first pope of Rome and leader, father, or should I say, parent, of the early church. We heard in our reading that Peter jumps into the lake, supposedly embarrassed by his state of undress, but symbolically, replicating baptism and new birth. And then there are the three questions which mirror Jesus' three questions to Peter of three chapters ago, when he denied Jesus. These gave Peter the chance to redeem himself and to prepare him for his future role. Only a parent, and God, through their love, shows us so much grace and mercy, by giving us endless opportunities to learn, to say sorry and to make amends.

Jesus **meets us wherever we are** in our relationship with him, just like a parent: sometimes showing, sometimes telling, sometimes just being, waiting for us to comprehend the enormity of His love and to embrace all He has to offer. He acted in a way that the disciples would understand, by the simple, recognisable act of feeding them. He spoke to them in words that they could understand – not chastising them but telling them, gently, where to cast their nets. He gave Peter the grace to be forgiven, for Thomas to doubt. He came to His disciples and met them where they were, both physically by the lake and spiritually, at a point of confusion and instability when they did not know what to do. He showed them through His actions both his love and what they now had to do.

I hope that you will take your picture home and I hope that it will be a reminder to you in this coming week that God loves you like a parent. There is no limit to God's love, He teaches us, He prepares us, He feeds us, He forgives us, He protects us and He will always meet us, just wherever we are.

Amen