



What's Love got to do with it?

Message by Pastor Andrew Kulasingham 3rd May 2020

Hi again everyone. Thanks for clicking the link to listen to this Sundays message.

We've come to the end of a 3-part series I began the week after Easter. I've been looking at the first few weeks in the lives of the disciples immediately after Christ's resurrection. I wanted to explore the transformation that happened in their lives, after Jesus' death and resurrection. I want to somehow make sense of how a group of men and women could be transformed so dramatically after their encounter with the risen saviour, and go on to transform their then known world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We've all experienced a global pandemic, and are slowly returning to some form of normalcy or what everyone is now calling a new normal. After being stripped of our ability to move around freely, restricted ability to purchase only essentials, unable to go to our offices and work, I'm suggesting that it could be a good time to relook at the way we have been doing life and see if we can jump start our lives with God, by trying to emulate the approach to life the disciples took after that life changing experience they had on and after Resurrection Day.

The first of the series entitled Living with God breath, we looked at John's account of Jesus appearing to the disciples on Resurrection Sunday. We looked at his first appearance in John chapter 20. Jesus came amongst them and breathed into them and they received the Holy Spirit. They received the "breath" of God. I suggested that we need to relearn how to breathe. To breathe God breath every day. To come to an awareness that the Holy Spirit – the Breath of God - is dwelling in us. We are breathing God breath. Inhaling the breath of God, inhaling the life of God, inhaling the peace of God, inhaling the health of God, inhaling the goodness of God. When we do that, the automatic response is to exhale the God breath into our work place, into our marriages, into our relationship with our children, our dealings with people every day.

This awareness that God Himself is in us, that we are full of God breath, transforms our view of everything we do and say – every single day – our lives overflowing with God in us. Like the apostles of old, we begin to see people around us experiencing the God breathed atmosphere, as we exhale the Spirit in our interactions with them.

Jesus said to the disciples after He breathed into them – "As the Father sent me, I now send you". Imagine, followers of Jesus, going about our everyday lives, with one big difference. We are now carriers of the Divine Breath. Filled with the Holy Spirit, literally breathing God atmosphere everywhere we go, surely it must have an impact in our lives and the lives of those around us.

Last week we continued with John's narrative and looked at John 21 - Jesus' third appearance. In my message entitled The Big Catch, we looked at the scene at the shore of Galilee where seven of the disciples encountered Jesus again for the third time. We looked at

the mindset change that is needed if we are to go out and make an actual difference in the world around us. We saw the importance of developing a predisposition of looking for the goodness of God, in every situation and circumstance in our lives. By looking out for signs of God activity, having a mindset that defaulted to looking for good happenings, John was able to identify the presence of Jesus in their midst.

In seeing God activity, we recognise the presence of God in our midst. And when we know when God is in our midst something good is going to happen. I remember as a boy, during the amazing charismatic renewal that swept our city, there was a simple chorus we loved singing at the start of our meetings.

We're together again, just praising the Lord.
We're together again in one accord.
Something good is going to happen.
Something good is in store.
We're together again.
Just praising the Lord.

With that sort of mindset, no wonder we saw amazing miracles and many, many lives being touched and transformed during that period of time.

When we have a mindset of looking out for God activity, we are more inclined to hear the voice of our Lord. His prompting, his direction. And repeatedly we have seen, in the gospels and the history of the church – obedience triggers the miraculous. It sure did that morning in Galilee.

We return now to that story in John chapter 21. We left that story last week with the disciples now having a big catch and dragging the net on to shore. John has identified the stranger as Jesus and Peter immediately jumps out of the boat once he hears that. Let's pick up the story from verse 9.

John 21:9-12

Then, as soon as they had come to land, they saw a fire of coals there, and fish laid on it, and bread. ¹⁰ Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish which you have just caught." ¹¹ Simon Peter went up and dragged the net to land, full of large fish, one hundred and fifty-three; and although there were so many, the net was not broken. ¹² Jesus said to them, "Come and eat breakfast." Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?"—knowing that it was the Lord.

Look at the words in verse 12. Don't you find that last sentence a little strange.

Yet none of the disciples dared ask Him, "Who are You?"—knowing that it was the Lord.

If they knew who he was, why did they need to ask him, "Who are you?". They didn't ask him because they weren't bold enough to ask him. But in reality they were going through what felt like a visual illusion.

We know you are risen. We know because you have appeared to us in two other occasions. We are staring right at you – but this is impossible. My brain is returning to what I know and believe all my life. Dead men don't come alive. My brain is trying to adjust itself but I dare not ask you to confirm again for the third time that it is you. I'd like to ask. I wish someone would ask – "Who are you? I know you prepared us for this. Spent three and a half years with us preparing us for this. But my brain is struggling to adjust to this new reality."

In his book “Thinking fast and slow”, American Psychologist Daniel Kahneman speaks of the “experiencing self” and the “remembering self”. The experiencing self is the now self – what is being experienced in the moment. The “remembering self” thinks in stories. We remember things not as binary data of facts like computers. We remember in concepts or stories that keep all the experiences of the five senses intact. The “remembering self” is selective in the story making process and edits as it deems fit.

So when asked the question “how was your vacation?” we cannot answer it in the moment because the event is in the past. So we access information from the “remembering self” based on the selective story-ing the “remembering self” has captured. The answer will be biased towards the major events that affected us most during that vacation.

If we had nine good days holidaying in the Bahamas, and broke a leg in an unfortunate accident on the tenth day, our storying of that holiday will be dominated by that final painful day we experienced in the Bahamas.

Our “remembering self” tends to edit the entire experience and condense it into a version of the holiday that probably isn’t very favourable. The next time we are making a decision on a holiday destination, we tend to decide against Bahamas without considering the wonderful memories captured during the nine good days. We end up with a distorted sense of the experience and make decisions based on that.

Kahneman calls it “duration neglect”, where we focus on one major aspect of the experience, while neglecting the entire experience as a whole, leaving us with a distorted sense of reality.

Now back to these seven young men at the Galilean shore. Yes, they had three and a half years with Jesus. They saw some amazing miracles. Three recorded miracles of Jesus raising the dead – including the most spectacular one with Lazarus being dead for four days.

So in its entirety, these men, based on their three and a half years of life with Jesus, having experienced the nature of Jesus and the fact that everything he has said has come to pass, should be quite comfortable with the fact they are in the midst of a resurrected Jesus.

But in reality, they are going through a conflict in their minds, and can’t get over the question – Who are you? Their remembering is tainted by the bias editing process of the horrific trauma of the tragic weekend. They remember that they abandoned Jesus at his moment of need. They remember scattering to save their lives when the full force of the law was unleashed at the garden that night.

They remember accounts told to them of his brutal treatment in the hands of the Romans, and his eventual death on the cross. These recent memories have formed their remembering experience and they are faced with a distorted reality – they are in conflict – who are you? To their credit – they decide to ignore the inner conflict.

Am I talking to you this morning? Is this making sense to you? Have you experienced some traumatic event? Are you going through a prolonged sickness? Is a failure in relationship defining who you are? Is your current financial difficulty defining how you are seeing God as your provider? Is there a conflict between your perception of reality and the reality God is presenting to you? Who are you God? You say you are Jehovah Jireh – the God who provides – but are you? You say you will be with me and never forsake me. But are you with me? You say you are merciful and long suffering, a God of second chances, but are you? Who are you?

When in conflict with God, I’m inviting you to consider that your reality might be a distorted one. Your remembering of God might be going through “duration neglect”. Your remembering of God might be biased, based on a distorted reality.

Pause for a moment. Think of the duration of your journey with God. You might say, “Andrew I don’t have a good track record with God. But my friend – he has a great track record.”

Go to the Gospels, check out His track record. Go to the book of Acts, check Him out there. Go to the Psalms; the psalmist will tell you a thing or two about His track record. Go to Hebrews chapter 11 for a good dose of a healthy perspective of God’s track record with those who chose to journey with Him. Are you in conflict right now? God, who are you?

When in conflict with God, remember what the disciples did. They chose to go with Jesus’ consistent track record. None of the disciples dared ask Him, “Who are You?” - knowing that it was the Lord.

We must quickly move along.

John 21:15-19

So when they had eaten breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me more than these?” He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.”

He said to him, “Feed My lambs.”

¹⁶ He said to him again a second time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?”

He said to Him, “Yes, Lord; You know that I love You.” He said to him, “Tend My sheep.”

¹⁷ He said to him the third time, “Simon, son of Jonah, do you love Me?” Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?” And he said to Him, “Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.”

Jesus said to him, “Feed My sheep. ¹⁸ Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.” ¹⁹ This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God. And when He had spoken this, He said to him, “Follow Me.”

Jesus asks Peter three times the same question, “Do you love me?” You can’t but see this story in light of Peter’s denial of Jesus. Three times he was asked, “Aren’t you one of his disciples?” and Peter says, “No I’m not?”

Again he is asked: You are definitely one of His? No I’m not.

Third time he is challenged: I know for sure you are His disciple. No I am not.

The rooster crows and Peter will carry that experience with him for life. That’s the elephant in the room. That’s Peter’s conflict. That’s why after being convinced Jesus was risen, he doesn’t go looking for the resurrected saviour but says, “Let’s go fishing.” Fishing? Back to the old way of life?

Where’s the bold Peter who sees Jesus walking on water and says, “If it’s you, Lord, bid me come?”. Steps out of the boat and walks on water. Where’s the confident Peter who when, asked, “Who do you say I am?” replies, “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” Where is the defiant Peter, when faced with an angry mob come to arrest Jesus, draws his sword and cuts off the ear of a servant? Where is Peter? He is drowning in a distorted experience of a man who has denied Jesus three times.

Jesus is addressing the elephant in the room. “Peter, Do you love me?” John uses two Greek words for love as he narrates this story. “*Agape*” – which in the New Testament is used exclusively for God’s unconditional love. And another Greek word for love – “*phileo*” – which is endearing friendship.

Jesus asks Peter – “Peter do you unconditionally love me?” Peter answers – “Lord you know you are my dearest friend.”

“Peter. Do you unconditionally love me?” “Lord, you know this. You are my dearest friend.”

Third time Jesus asks Peter, but this time using the Greek word Peter used. “Peter, am I really your dearest friend?” This time the Bible says, “Peter was grieved because He said to him the third time, “Do you love Me?”

“Lord, You know all things; You know that I love You.” “You know you’re my dearest friend”.

What was the point of this conversation? This wasn’t a mere conversation. This was an encounter. God and Man – a moment of destiny that will change the entire trajectory of the man called Simon Peter. From this moment onwards he is no longer Peter the fisherman. This is the becoming of Peter the Apostle.

The next time we are introduced to this man, we are introduced to Peter the preacher – standing up and speaking to an entire crowd that would penetrate the hearts of men, who will cry out, “What must we do to be saved?” 3000 men would turn to Jesus Christ in one day.

What made the difference? Please hear me out as I draw this message to a close. Peter was a passionate man. But unbridled passion is too volatile to be of any use in the Kingdom of God. Uncontrolled passion can even be harmful. Just look at Samson – see what damage can be done with the mixture of anointing and uncontrolled passion.

Jesus had to anchor Peter’s passion in love. Love, agape love, God’s love, unconditional love will harness passion and use it for the glory of God.

God is the most passionate being you will ever meet. He is the all consuming fire. The psalmist says: “...a fire goes before Him and burns up all his enemies.” And yet, this all consuming fire, does not consume you or me. He is the one who came down and consumed the offering during the prophet Elijah’s challenge to the prophets of Baal. And yet when this all consuming fire, takes on the form of a man, and is face to face with a leper, he touches him, tells him he wills for him to be whole and heals him of his leprosy.

Passion must be anchored in God’s love, if it is to be used in God’s Kingdom. Passion must be anchored in God’s love. “Peter, do you love me.”

And then Jesus speaks into Peter’s spirit. Now don’t miss the next thing Jesus would say to him.

John 21:18 (NKJV)

Most assuredly, I say to you, when you were younger, you girded yourself and walked where you wished; but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will gird you and carry you where you do not wish.” This He spoke, signifying by what death he would glorify God.

The last time Peter displayed uncontrolled passion and said he will never betray him, Jesus prophesied – “Peter, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times.”

Now after Peter’s passion is anchored in God’s love, He speaks another prophetic word.

“Peter, your deepest passion is to die for me – I will grant it to you. One day when you are old, they will stretch you out and you will bring glory to God with your death.”

Tradition tells us, after establishing the church of our Lord Jesus Christ, being father to the faith, leaving us two incredible epistles, an older man Peter, would be dragged, bound to a cross and die for his faith.

Friends, may I invite you this morning, to let the Love of God so captivate you, that all your passion for God, your passion for the lost world, your passion to do something meaningful in life – anchor that passion to the love of God. Once anchored in love – then and only then can we feed His sheep. Then and only then can we make a difference in our world.

To paraphrase the words of the great 17th century saint, Brother Lawrence: Let us be preoccupied with knowing God. The more we know God, the more we will desire to know Him. And the deeper we know Him, the greater will be our love for Him. And if our love of God is great, we should love him equally in pains and pleasures.

The more we know Him, the more we will love Him. The more we love Him the greater will be our desire to know Him more.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you. The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.
