

## **A Post Easter Family Service by Rev. Caleb Hardie**

**BBQ – at the door as people enter (a couple of staff members in aprons serving up some fresh fish)**

### **Call to Worship**

Who tried the fish? How was it?

There is an ancient Chinese proverb that says, “If you want to be happy for one hour, get intoxicated. If you wish to be happy for three days, get married. If you wish to be happy for eight days, kill your pig and eat it. If you wish to be happy forever, learn to fish.”

Given that we are only here for the hour perhaps I should have organised wine!

I do enjoy a glass of wine, but occasionally it leaves me with a headache – and we don't want anyone to leave here with a headache...so we'll go with the fish...used as a symbol of life for thousands of years, loved and enjoyed by people all over the world – the food of the New Testament...a symbol of life after the events of Easter...may we discover God and life in fish tonight!

### **Hymn:**

#### **A Gathering Prayer**

The smell of fresh fish cooking welcomes us...

Beside the shores of Galilee he built a fire and prepared a meal...

The taste of fresh fish still lingers on the lips of those brave enough or hungry enough to try it...

Beside the shores of Galilee he offered them something to eat, he restored their courage and reminded them that everything had changed...everything had changed!

And so we gather ...we gather to awaken our senses to Easter events. We gather to remember together that along with fish he also brought comfort and relief to those exhausted by life – we are here to remember that Easter really did make a difference ...that out of destruction and despair, exhaustion and depression new life can be found in the God who comes to awaken our senses to experience life in all its fullness.

Amen.

**First Reading:** John 3: 16-17

**Second Reading:** John 21: 4-9

**Message:**

Pick up one of the fishing rods...I do enjoy a bit of fishing. Most of the time it is on my brother's boat 'Joleene' – that's the other girl in his life, 'his harlot of the harbour' as it were named after the song "Joleene", by Dolly Parton.

Do you know the song?

He talks about you in his sleep  
Theres nothing I can do to keep  
From crying when he calls your name, jolene

And I can easily understand  
How you could easily take my man  
But you dont know what he means to me, jolene

Jolene, jolene, jolene, jolene  
Im begging of you please dont take my man  
Jolene, jolene, jolene, jolene  
Please dont take him just because you can.

A perfect name for a boat! During his speech at his wedding reception after having being given a bit of grief by his two brothers about this 'other girl' he spoke of his undying love for both his girls – and then in what remains the coolest performance I have seen to date – he picked up his electric guitar and sang the song accompanied on the drums by his bride in her wedding dress who completely stole the show!

Yes, I do enjoy a bit of fishing on Joleene when I can – this morning was one of those moments when I could for work related purposes of course! It used to always be about the pillies, and squid, maybe some mullet...and we would catch a snapper or ten and occasionally very occasionally we would return home empty handed...now it is all about the soft baits...a mock bait – no smelly bait on the fingers...and the fish keep on coming!

This morning we had two of us on bait and two using soft bait – at 7.30 it was 5 nil to the bait boys which for me was a huge relief given I was trying to catch fish for the service – I got the first two – the Lord doth provide! So by 7.30 we were well ahead and giving the soft bait boys plenty of grief – oh but how the tide turns!!!! By 10.00 the soft baits had taken the lead much to their enjoyment...and we could not catch them after that – but we did manage a minor victory with the biggest fish of the day caught on a bit of squid.

Nothing like a bit of fishing to escape the pressures of life, nothing like a bit of fishing to soothe the mind – that is of course if you catch something...it is not all that soothing to wake at the crack of dawn only to come back with nothing.

One of the great post-Easter stories is the one we heard tonight – a fishing story...exhausted and traumatised by the whirlwind events of the last few days – Peter decides to return to what he knows best – fishing – and joined by six other disciples they head out for an overnight escape...we all know that feeling don't we ...when life gets the better of us, when we feel overwhelmed by events, by expectations, by grief, and we seek to escape if only for a moment...to busy ourselves with a task, we seek some space...some peace from it all...

That is where these guys were at...and so through the night they fished...not with soft baits, or pillies or squid...but with nets and I'm sure they had their own well practised techniques...but to add insult to injury they arrived back early in the morning with nothing, not a fish in sight!

There is a guy standing on the beach and he calls out to them, '*Friends, did you catch anything?*'

Did you find what you were looking for?

*No*, they answered...

No we did not.

That is an awful feeling isn't it – when we are desperate for a moment's peace, desperate for something to re-invigorate us, to refresh us...and for whatever reason we cannot find it...it remains illusive and out of reach...when we go looking for something in the wrong place, when we throw it all away and try to escape our lives only to discover the problems remain essentially the same even if the scenery is different - those are the

tough moments aren't they?

That is where these guys were at – I'm sure most of us at one point or another have been there too.

And so this man on the shore calls out again in what is a truly post-Easter moment and says: *“Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some.”*

*When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.*

At that point they suddenly realised who it was on the beach – the one they had followed for the past three years, the one who they had triumphantly walked beside into Jerusalem as Palm branches waved about them, the one they had seen heal the sick, give sight to those who could not see...the one who had given them courage...the one who they had seen arrested, the one who in panic and fear they had betrayed and abandoned, the one whose brutal death they had watched in total despair...

It was that guy...Jesus, a hard man to keep down...Jesus on the beach, risen, and cooking a breakfast of fish and bread...

(Monitor to bring in the whole cooked fish and a basket of bread)

And Jesus took the fish and the bread and he gave it to them (break the fish and bread up as you speak)...and together they talked and ate.

And something happened...it is hard to say exactly what...but something happened in the exchange of fish, to change these men who had been depressed and disillusioned with life, these men who had failed and who had lost their way, who had tried to escape their lives ...

...something happened to change them, because they left the beach rejuvenated, and restored by this encounter to face what became for them a dangerous and precarious future as they established the Christian church amidst great opposition and persecution ...they faced that future with hope and with courage...because they had found what it was they were looking for, something that was not dependent on circumstance or even on things going their way- something beyond. Lost hope and distant dreams were reawakened.

Must have been some very good fish!

What are you looking for? Where are you looking? Have you discovered it?

There is a rabbinic story told about a man who left his house looking for treasure. Dissatisfied with his current lot in life, he wanted something more, he wanted to discover the meaning to life. Something he felt he couldn't find in the humdrum of his present existence. So he started out on his journey to find this great treasure.

After a long trek he found himself in some strange country. Before he lay down to sleep he took off his shoes and put them on the side of the road pointing in the direction towards where he was heading. While he was fast asleep someone came a long took the man's shoes and turned them to face the opposite direction. When the man woke up the next morning he put on his shoes and with out realising he headed back in the direction he had come from. He travelled some distance, and then noticed a house that was strangely familiar. He went inside the house and was greeted by a family that looked remarkably like his own family. He settled down there and to his surprise he found the treasure he was looking for.

How often do we find ourselves looking longingly in the distance for fulfilment only to miss the treasure that is right at our feet?

The Post-Easter story is all about the fish at our feet – it is about a fresh-start, about reawakening our dreams and hopes about discovering the fish all around us, the life all around us that we have somehow missed because our attention was elsewhere despairing our past or stressing about our future ...God calls to us from the shore, come and eat – discover the life only God can offer, that no circumstances, not even death can defeat.

### **Prayer**

God we praise you for the great surprise of Easter – your transformation of what had seemed like the end into a new beginning and a fresh start.

Through an abundance of fish you transformed sorrow into joy, doubt to faith, questions to answers, confusion to confidence, depression to hope. Forgive us for those times when we lose faith in you and in each other,

when life fails to meet up to our expectations and give to us hope to reawaken our belief and faith.

We pray for those unable to make sense of the situations they find themselves in, their hopes shattered by their experiences of life – those who are anxious, fearful, disillusioned, depressed, faced with suffering that seems beyond what they can bear.

God of the unexpected, may the surprise of Easter burst into their lives and our own, revealing new possibilities for life, giving new meaning to our relationships and renewed purpose for our lives.

Help us to find what it is we are searching for, help us to see the good that is in front of us, help us to experience the difference Easter makes. Amen

**Hymn:** *Fill your hearts with joy and gladness..*

**Blessing and Threefold Amen**

A symbol of Easter - Chocolate fish and Wafers!