

## Sermon Archive 242

Sunday 21 April, 2019 - Easter

Knox Church, Christchurch

Lessons: Acts 10: 34-43  
(ref. to Isaiah 43: 1b-3a)

Preacher: Rev. Dr Matthew Jack



Peter: fisherman from Capernaum, a Jew, a child of Israel. As a boy, he would have been told the stories of his people - his ancestors: Abram on his journey; Moses on his hillside; exodus from Egypt, manna in the desert. As he grew, year by year fed by the Passover, he would have been encouraged to see himself as belonging to a people forged and formed by wilderness experience. There'd be something deep within Peter, speaking to his sense of freedom coming only from an experience of being tested by want, formed by poverty, made real in the crucible. Born into that story, raised within a country that was occupied, having to fish a precarious livelihood out of the sea (no fish, no income, no food on the table), Peter knows in his own experience the experience of his wilderness-formed people.

But then his imagination is stolen by a carpenter from Nazareth. "Put your nets down here, Peter" Jesus says; and Peter does. And the fatally unproductive run of not-a-single-fish is broken. Peter comes back to shore with nets full of fish - and a promise that now he is fishing for people. Such an amazing carpenter, this Jesus - a carpenter of lives and life - a fashioner of hope. Peter comes to follow him, falls in love with him, declares him the Christ. They go around doing good, healing all who were oppressed - all around Judea and Jerusalem. This is Spirit. This is anointing. This is grace - within the eventually-to-fail wilderness of Roman rule and everyday injustice. Yes, this Jesus life is wonder. This is grace - it's the emerging from the wilderness of a brave new kingdom. We are witnesses to all that he did - until he dies - until they put him to death by hanging him on a tree.

As Jesus dies, Peter is cast back into the wilderness. Just another, but more than another, deep scarring of the heart. Just another, but more than another sad formative experience. Did they say of the suffering servant that he was a man of sorrow, acquainted with grief? Well that's the wilderness for you - formed by grief. Good Friday says Peter forever will be marked by loss, defined by tragedy. Forever his identity will be that of a wilderness person - bereaved, broken, battered, beset by an absence. Within his people's long history of journeying through wilderness, Peter is stamped seemingly finally by hunger and thirst.

Peter rises to speak. He tells all who are present to listen, that on the third day God raised Jesus of Nazareth - and allowed him to appear. Peter speaks of God presenting the living One not to all people, but to a chosen people (echoes of covenant choosing), a people chosen to eat and drink with Christ. Peter speaks of a small new community of witnesses who, beyond the claims of finality by death, are fed and nurtured, forgiven and made new in a hope that rises up. Peter speaks of Easter life answering back to Death. He speaks of miracle forming and feeding a once-broken people.

People of Knox; it has been our Lenten journey to travel, in story, with our ancestors in faith. We've seen with them that much of the journey is through the wilderness. We've had Abram struggling in the desert to offer and offering that amounted to more than decaying meat. We've had Moses retreating in fear from seeing God. We've had people complaining about the tedious ordinariness of the manna by which they are kept from starving. We've found Jesus grappling with the suggestions of a tempter. And we have clung to the knowledge that all of that wilderness experience, if held by sacred hands, if opened to the companionship of the great One who turns bad to good, can be formative of character and hope. We clung to that hope - until we witnessed a death in the wilderness. The redeeming one was crucified - death was our Lenten experience - as our humanity was formed.

But now Peter speaks of a greater forming of humanity. We **can** be defined by our loss. We **can** be fashioned by our failure. We **can** be

defined by our shared committing of sin - and we are. But on an Easter morning, Christ is risen. He calls around himself a people with whom to eat and drink. At Easter we become a people called by One who lives - people living in the presence of life - people given a new food that we too might rise. We are a people drawn into the presence of the judge of the living and the dead - who have been declared "not dead" by him, but alive. We have become a people who find ourselves not simply through wilderness experience, but through Easter faith. Into the desert comes a flood of life.

*Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;  
I have called you by name, you are mine.  
When you pass through the waters, I will be with you;  
and through the rivers, they shall not overwhelm you;  
when you walk through fire you shall not be burned,  
and the flame shall not consume you.  
For I am the Lord your God,  
the Holy One of Israel, your Saviour.*

[Isaiah 43: 1b-3a]

To those words of God, on Good Friday we replied "O really? Are you serious?"

Today, it is livingly serious. New Easter principles, new Easter priorities, new Easter commitments, new Easter abilities and bottom-line determinations are coming to claim us. We are not formed only by wilderness. Today we are formed by the giving of life.

So, Abram falls into a deep and scary darkness. He feels he can't offer anything beautiful, and that his best offering of praise is just carrion for vultures. Abram's wilderness brothers and sisters in our time feel unable to produce anything that is good. God says "Christ is risen - life has come". For Abram's family, we stand with God. We are formed by the giving of life.

So, Moses hides in fear. He's frightened of God; he's hiding from his deeds. In that wilderness both he, and his brothers and sisters in our

time, suspend the journey. But God says "Christ is risen - life has come". For Moses' family, we stand with God. We are formed by the giving of life.

So, the people of Israel now can find no manna. For their physical existence, they now must plant, cultivate, work and harvest. They're back to the situation of the original curse "you will live by the sweat of your brow". For those people, and for their brothers and sisters in our time, a hunger emerges - (turn those stones into bread). But God says "Christ is risen - life has come". Christ calls us to a table for more than daily bread - and we stand with God, are fed by God, are formed by God. Yes, there is wilderness, but also there is Easter. Light where there was darkness. Peace where there was war. Life where there was death. Never expected, counter-experience, miracle of God. On this, we stand with God. We are formed by the giving of life.

-ooOoo-

Peter; fisherman from Capernaum, a Jew, a child of Israel. Formed from boyhood as someone who knows all about wilderness. Into his life comes Jesus, from Nazareth. Into his failure comes the God who redeems. Into his tragedy comes the miracle of resurrection. Into our wilderness comes the Giver of life.

He is risen.

He is risen indeed.

Into the wilderness comes a flood of life,  
through Christ our Lord,

Amen.

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