

Sunday School Notes: 7 May (John 21: 1-23)

We know that the Jewish authorities put out the rumour that the disciples stole the body. This seemed to be the only possible explanation. The rumour that Jesus was alive again seemed impossible yet this is the rumour which has persisted for 20 centuries!

We don't have a day-by-day account of what happened after the resurrection. All we have are the highlights, just the details which were remembered by or repeated to the writers of the gospels many years later.

The disciple John, who wrote the fourth gospel, had been there when Mary Magdalene's pain turned to joy as she realised that the tomb was empty because the Lord was risen! He probably heard the story of the men from Emmaus who had talked things over with their mystery guest – but for some reason didn't record it. Perhaps their news was overshadowed in his mind by the fact that Jesus himself came into the room just after they did.

John records two resurrection accounts which he remembered so vividly that he just had to share them, even though other writers didn't include them in their accounts.

His first story concerned one of the disciples, Thomas. Thomas had been out of the upper room when Jesus first came to see his disciples after the resurrection. And, despite all the other disciples' obvious delight, he remained unconvinced. After all, this resurrection story was hard to believe. For a whole week he battled with this idea that someone could rise from the dead! Perhaps he thought the other disciples were playing a trick on him or that they were unstable as a result of their grief!

Then Jesus came into the upper room through the locked doors again – and this time Thomas was there. I think Jesus teases him gently for he said something like this:

"Hello Thomas! I gather you don't think I am alive! You said you would only believe if you could put your finger into these nail-prints and put your hand into my side where the spear went in. OK then! Here's your chance to prove that I am real. Reach out – here I am!"

Thomas probably ducked away, aware that he had been a total idiot. How embarrassing that Jesus knew everything he had said! He didn't need to 'prove' anything by touching. All he could say now was, "My Lord and my God!" Those are the last words we ever hear from Thomas – the doubter had become the believer. There is pretty good evidence that Thomas went as far as India proclaiming the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. He was convinced after all!!

John's second special memory centred round the lake of Galilee where seven of the disciples were waiting restlessly for Jesus to appear again. Eventually Peter couldn't sit still and wonder and talk any longer. He needed some action! And so he persuaded the others to go fishing with him. But it was a frustrating night! Not a single bite-not even from a sardine! At dawn they headed back to shore.

When they had turned back to land, a man on the shore hailed them and asked if they had caught anything. The boat was probably riding so high that he knew the answer before he even asked the

question! Then he told them to cast their nets over the right side of the boat. The disciples knew it was possible to see shoals of fish from land which the movement of the boat would obscure. So they obeyed and caught an enormous shoal of fish. They couldn't bring their net in, it was so full – they just had to drag the full net along with them to the shore.

While they were doing this, John suddenly realised that the man on the shore was the very man they had been waiting for – Jesus. When he shared this idea with Peter, Peter grabbed his clothes so he looked a bit more respectable and jumped off the boat, leaving his friends to handle the catch while he splashed his way to the shore.

It was indeed Jesus on the shore. He had made a fire and was already braaiing some fish and bread for their breakfast. When Jesus asked for some extra fish, Peter went back and helped off-load the fish they had caught. Then they had their meal, Jesus doling out the bread and fish just as he had done when he fed the 5000. It must have been an amazingly wonderful meal.

After breakfast Jesus and Peter and John went for a walk along the beach. John trailed a bit behind because clearly Jesus wanted to talk to Peter. Three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved him; Three times Peter replied that he did, although by the third question he was hurt and blurted out his answer quite roughly; three times Jesus gave Peter a task to do. Jesus (the 'Good Shepherd') wasn't going to be here on earth much longer, and so Peter was to care for those who would follow him. Jesus made it very clear to Peter that this following would be tough – Peter would be imprisoned and killed for obeying these orders. Yet Peter was overjoyed that his triple betrayal was being wiped away.

John, following close behind, overheard the discussion. We have no record of what Jesus said to him – but we know that Jesus has the perfect plan for each of his followers. And his plan for John included writing the fourth gospel and becoming the minister of churches far away from that quiet sea. John too suffered for his faith. Like Nelson Mandela he was sent into exile on a lonely island, far away from those he loved.

But memories of times like this 'fish-braai' gave the disciples courage. They never again doubted that Jesus was Lord and Saviour. They went everywhere declaring that Jesus was indeed the Messiah – God's Son, risen from the dead. Thanks to their stories, we know that Jesus was no ordinary man. Thanks to their stories, we can be sure that Jesus will provide for us as he did for them.

PUZZLE

What item of clothing does Jesus use to help Peter to understand what would happen to him when he followed Jesus?