

John 21.1-14; 1 Pet 1.3-9

21 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples,
by the Sea of Galilee.^[a]

It happened this way: ²

Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus^[b]), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together.

³“I’m going out to fish,” Simon Peter told them,
and they said, “We’ll go with you.”

So they went out and got into the boat,
but that night they caught nothing.

⁴Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore,
but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus.

⁵He called out to them, “Friends, haven’t you any fish?”
“No,” they answered.

⁶He said, “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.

⁷Then the disciple whom Jesus loved
said to Peter, “It is the Lord!”

As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, “It is the Lord,”
he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off)
and jumped into the water.

⁸The other disciples followed in the boat,
towing the net full of fish,

for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards.^[c]

⁹When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there

with fish on it, and some bread.

¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish you have just caught."

¹¹So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat

and dragged the net ashore.

It was full of large fish, 153,

but even with so many the net was not torn.

¹²Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast."

None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?"

They knew it was the Lord.

¹³Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them,

and did the same with the fish.

¹⁴This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples

after he was raised from the dead.

³Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ!

In his great mercy

he has given us new birth

into a living hope

through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

⁴and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.

This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,

⁵who through faith are shielded by God's power

until the coming of the salvation

that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

⁶In all this you greatly rejoice,

though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief

in all kinds of trials.

⁷These have come
so that the proven genuineness of your faith—
of greater worth than gold,
which perishes even though refined by fire—
may result in praise, glory and honor
when Jesus Christ is revealed.

⁸Though you have not seen him,
you love him;
and even though you do not see him now,
you believe in him
and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy,
⁹for you are receiving the end result of your faith,
the salvation of your souls.

Jesus on the beach

A sermon preached by Roland Price at St Mary's Cholsey, on Sunday 14 May 2017

Readings: 1 Pet 1.3-9; John 21.1-14

Memories are important.

The Bible talks much about our memories and their significance in each person building up a deep relationship with God.

The Israelites were to remember the Law and keep it.

Proverbs 4.11 says

My son, pay attention to what I say; listen closely to my words.

Do not let them out of your sight; keep them within your heart

For they are life to those who find them, and health to a man's whole body

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life

Memories and emotions are a powerful combination as confirmed by those abused as children or those who have experienced loss or violence.

Déjà vu is an experience of the power of our individual minds in linking memories we have produced in the past to the present experience .

Déjà vu is a French expression, which literally means, 'already seen';

That is, you have 'the strong sensation that an event you are currently experiencing has already been imprinted on your memory in the past'.

Approximately two-thirds of the population have had a déjà vu experience.

It is a common experience in healthy individuals.

Let me ask you a question: How many times do the gospels and Paul in 1 Co 15 record that Jesus appeared to his disciples after his resurrection and including his ascension?

In the 40 days between Easter Sunday to Ascension, the Gospels and Paul writing in 1 Cor 15 conclude that Jesus made a total of 10 appearances – that is, once every 4 days.

This is not many, especially when some of the disciples found it difficult to believe in him.

Matthew comments in Mat 28.17 that at the Ascension when the disciples saw Jesus, they worshiped him; but some doubted.

Their faith would have to have time to grow.

What I want to do this morning is to look at one way Jesus sought to reinforce the fact that he was alive in the minds of his disciples, thereby developing their faith in him as Lord and Saviour.

The Sea of Galilee or the Sea of Tiberius was a good place to meet on the third occasion Jesus appeared to his disciples.

Galilee was important because Jesus had begun his ministry there.

The disciples were returning to their roots.

Andrew and Peter, James and John had been sorting out their fishing gear by the side of Lake Galilee when they had left all to follow Jesus.

Peter seems to have been a restless; he needed to be doing something.
As evening approached in Galilee he told the others he was going out to fish.
Peter led and others followed.
Seven disciples got into the boat; they fished all night - but caught nothing.
This could have been the start of a déjà vu experience for Peter, James and John, because Luke recorded a very similar event at the beginning of Jesus' ministry.
On that occasion the disciples were fishing at night when Jesus found out that they had not caught anything.
He told them to throw the net on the other side of the boat.
When they did this they experienced a great haul of fishes which broke the net.
I am sure that that was not the only night they caught nothing.
But now the sun was beginning to rise.
At first, the disciples did not see the man on the shore preparing a bar-b-que.
He called out "Friends, have you any fish?"
Surely Peter's mind would link the event three years ago with this present experience!
"No" the disciples answered, perhaps somewhat frustrated and angry with themselves.
"Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some".
Without thinking they threw the net over the right side of the boat,
Just as they had done those three years ago.
But it still hadn't clicked with the disciples Peter, James and John who the man was.
Perhaps they were so focussed on what they were doing that they did not recognise his voice.
They were too concerned that some fish were caught in the net.
All hands to the net!
They had considerable difficulty in hauling it in, because the net was full of thrashing fish and it took all their concentration to land it.
Then John, the disciple whom Jesus loved, realized who the man on the beach was .
If there was a déjà vu experience, it was his.
True to form John said to Peter "It is the Lord!"
Peter responded immediately. He was desperate for Jesus' forgiveness.
Wrapping himself in his outer garment, he jumped into the water, half swimming and half striding through the waves.
He left the others to operate the boat, towing the net full of fish the hundred or so yards to the shore.
Having reached Jesus, Peter waited for his colleagues to join him on the beach.
Together they saw a fire of burning coals with fish on it, and some bread.
Déjà vu for Peter who was probably aware of another fire in the High Priest's house three days ago.
The fish and bread possibly alerted the disciples to the feeding of the 5000.
Jesus invited the disciples to bring some fish they have just caught.
Peter got back into the boat to help drag the net onto the shore.
John says there were 153 large fish caught in the net,
Enough to break the net as on the first occasion.
But the net they used this time showed no sign of being broken.
It really was the time for the disciples to catch men

Who was this man on the beach?

We know that the disciples realized it was Jesus, but he was different from how they knew him previously.

They must have been somewhat nervous in his presence.

John says, 'Not one of them asked him who he was, because they knew it was the Lord'.

How did they know him?

They knew it was Jesus because he took bread and gave it to them - yet another déjà vu experience, such as on the road to Emmaus, the feeding of the 5000, and on the many occasions they had a meal together.

And Jesus did the same with the fish.

This string of emotional memories was one of the ways in which Jesus reinforced in the experiences in his disciples minds.

In particular, he wanted them to recall with confidence their own memories that Jesus had died on a cross and yet was now fully alive, such that they could fully put their faith in him.

Memories are very important in the spiritual life.

Peter in his first letter says that, through the resurrection of Jesus we are born again, not resurrected, into God's family.

And because we are in God's family, we have an inheritance kept for us in heaven as we journey through this world.

We can have confidence that by faith in God's power to shield us until Jesus comes again, the emotional experience is one of great joy, though it may well be accompanied by grief in all kinds of trials.

Peter says the trials are to prove the genuineness of our faith that it may result in praise, glory and honour when Jesus is revealed for who he really is.

And here is the crunch.

Though we have not seen him we love him.

Though we do not see him now we believe in him.

Memories are so important in the Bible in supporting individuals and communities.

For example, Jesus washed the disciples' feet, showing that the servant is not greater than his Master.

Jesus celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples just before he was captured and died, so that in doing such a common thing as breaking bread and sharing a cup of wine we remember Jesus until he comes again.

Well, we do not really know whether the disciples had déjà vu experiences or not.

But if they did then they would have been surprised.

Maybe you have had such experiences in connection with your Christian faith and with places or with smells, or sounds.

Hang on to those experiences, because they are one of the ways in which God may speak to you.

A déjà vu experience in a Christian context can be the means of triggering prophecy, of deepening faith, and of enlarging our knowledge of Jesus.