

I don't know whether you have ever attended a reunion. It might have been a school reunion, or a work reunion, or more commonly a family reunion for a wedding or funeral. Reunions can of course be great fun and a chance to catch up with a particular old friend, a work colleague or family member who for various reasons – family, work commitments and (I say this especially of myself) laziness - you have failed to keep in touch with. But reunions can also be difficult. There are those you would rather not see; perhaps the school mate you were not very nice to, the person at work whom you just didn't get on well with, and the family member you find incredibly irritating.

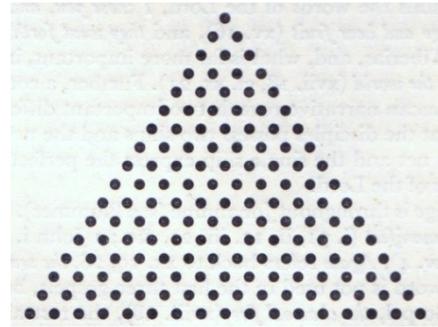
When the women arrived at the empty tomb in Mark's Gospel, a young man – perhaps an angel, told them, 'Go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee, there you will see him, just as he has told you' (Mark 16:8). It's an invitation to a reunion! You would think that the disciples, and particularly Peter who is singled out in the invite, would be anxious to attend.

Mark's Gospel ends at this point, but it is only John's Gospel which narrates the disciples' reunion with the risen Jesus by the Sea of Galilee.

What immediately strikes us is that everything has returned to normal. Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, James, John and two other unnamed disciples have gone out fishing. There is no hint that the resurrection has affected them in any way. But it is night- time, which in John's Gospel is a metaphor of ignorance, and despite their skills as fisherman they fail to catch a single fish, their lives are unproductive and without the transformative joy of Easter.

And then in a very ordinary and matter of fact way the resurrected Jesus appears at daybreak; night gives way to day and their lives are about to be transformed. Jesus tells them to fish on the right-hand side of the boat, which they do and they bring in a huge catch. The 153 fish and unbroken net symbolise the Easter church.

Much ink has been spilt over what the 153 large fish symbolise. But the most likely explanation is that 153 symbolises perfection in the form a triangle. Each side has numbers from 1 to 17, add up 1+2+3+4 and so on and the total comes to 153. And if each number in the triangle is represented by a dot, then



there are 153 dots in the triangle. Greek zoologists thought there were 153 kinds of fish which would imply that the disciples have caught a perfect number of fish. Jesus told his disciples to be fishers of people, so the fish represent all the people of the world to whom the gospel is to be preached. The same idea is contained in Jesus' parable of the net:

Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was thrown into the sea and caught fish of every kind; when it was full, they drew it ashore, sat down. (Matthew 13:47-8).

So, by now it is clear that the promised reunion with the risen Christ has happened. But it is not without its awkwardness, especially for Peter. Just like Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, he becomes aware of his nakedness, which is his guilt at having denied knowing Jesus the last time he saw him in Jerusalem. A guilt made all worse by the fact that Peter emphatically declared to Jesus, just before they set off for Jerusalem, that he would never desert him.

But Peter need not have worried. Any awkwardness is removed by Jesus' simple, non-judgemental, words, 'Come and have breakfast'. The resurrected Jesus enters into Peter's life and meets him in a very ordinary, one might say, human way.

The meal they have together is meant to be a type of Eucharist. John says, 'Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them...' (John 21:11). This tells us something very profound. When we receive Holy Communion we may think that it is all about us coming into the presence of Christ, but the extraordinary thought is that it is also about Jesus *continuing* to be present with us in the world – as if, in a way, he has never left it. Holy Communion is a reunion party!

This takes us to the final part of the story, Peter's reunion with Jesus. Jesus has entered into Peter's life, now it is Peter who enters into the life of the risen Jesus. Three times Jesus asks Peter if he loves him, and each time Peter says, 'Lord you know that I love you', he cancels out each of his three denials when

before he said he didn't know Jesus (Mark 14:71). After his third affirmation he is now completely ready to enter the life of the risen Jesus; Jesus predicts his martyrdom – possibly by crucifixion, which according to tradition took place in Rome.

'When you grow old you will stretch out your hands and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go' (John 21:18).

This is what St Paul means when he says that being a Christian is to die and rise in Christ. For most of us this symbolises our rejection of sin and evil by saying yes to the life which God offers us. But for some others, like Peter, rejection of evil also literally means making the ultimate sacrifice of death.

The Easter hope is that when we accept the offer to be reunited with the risen Jesus, we know that whatever awkwardness we might feel because of our failings, his love for us should give us the confidence to overcome such worries and to say 'yes' to his offer and 'yes' to life with God.

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