

Karen Hollis

May 5

John 21:1-19

### **Signs along the Way**

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be reflections of your word to us in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Um

What do you do when the big thing you've been working on is done. You've been planning a trip for a year, you follow your itinerary, have the experience, take lots of pictures and come home with a sigh of gratitude and spaciousness.

I hear people play the long game on planning for retirement – you see it coming from 5 years off, 2, 1, 6 months, finishing up projects, perhaps having conversations about where to live, close to the kids or friends, or here's an idea – let's move to a gulf island. Following retirement you take some space and time, doing things that bring comfort and grounding.

It seems like a human response on the other side of huge moments in life, to stick close to the familiar, reminding ourselves of who we are beyond circumstance. I certainly resonated with this – when I graduated from university I had to remind myself, who am I, what do I like to do?

The disciples follow this same principle as they go through their transition. They have been following the human, flesh and blood, but now they're in this period of spaciousness, where Jesus is appearing to them in a form none of us can understand. What do they do now? Like any other human, they do what they know – they're fishermen, so they go fishing. But it isn't the same . . . the disciples sit in the boat all night until daybreak and catch nothing. What are they doing wrong? Is this the right place for them? Still sitting in that spaciousness the living Jesus once filled, we can imagine them sitting on the water in silence, watching the sunrise . . .

This is the season where Jesus is appearing to them in bizarre ways. He appears to Mary at the tomb, he walks through walls and presents himself to the disciples, he walks with them as a stranger on the road, only to make himself known to them in the breaking of the bread and vanish from their sight. When you think about it, the disciples never recognize him by the way he looks, rather by what he says and does, and by the abundance they receive when they are obedient to him.

As the sun rises a person calls to them from the shore, “cast the net to the right side of the boat and you will find some fish.” Open to all ideas, even the seemingly silly ones, they do what the stranger suggests. While the rest of them pull on the net with all their strength and marvel at the fish, the disciple whom Jesus loved recognizes Jesus in their midst. Without the constraints of an ordinary human body, it seems the presence of the living Christ makes himself known in the language of their lives. God doesn’t appear to be blessing their fishing as they wait through the night, however, when they follow the suggestion of the risen Jesus, they receive abundance. In the end, it seems to be less about fishing and more about recognizing Jesus and following him on the Way.

I’m drawn to this idea of what it takes to recognise the living Christ – these scenes of revelation make me think about a scene from my favourite movie, *Whale Rider*. The story centers around Pikea, the granddaughter of the hereditary chief. Pikea’s mother and twin brother die at her birth, and her father names her after her direct ancestor Pikea, the Whale Rider, who, having nowhere else to turn, rode on the back of a whale from Hiwaiki to their New Zealand home. Trouble comes when she is born because a girl has no place in this hereditary line. Eleven years later the community is plagued with aimlessness and the young people have turned to drugs and alcohol. When the chief decides to do a search among the young boys for the next chief, young Pikea is excluded, but she still learns to fight in the way of the male warriors, she learns the chant that only men sing, and she retrieves from under the water the whale tooth her grandfather threw overboard, marking her as the new leader. The chief’s

denial of his granddaughter brings the community to a dark moment where Right Wales, the sacred spirits of their people, beach themselves on the shore of their village. After the community spends hours trying to get the whales back in the water, the chief stands on the beach and sees the Whale Rider . . . it is his granddaughter, Pikea on the back of a whale. This image doesn't lie. This is the future God has in mind; his heart is changed and the identity and soul of their community is restored . . . because God speaks in the language of our lives, in words and images we cannot deny.

It would be easy for someone to try and pull in that net bulging with fish and give thanks simply for the fish. But John includes these details that go further . . . they put in the net on the other side at his direction, and receive abundance and the net is not torn. When you follow Jesus on the Way, you have a sure foundation and a fullness of life beyond what any of us can imagine. Jesus says if we will follow his way the abundance he offers will not fail us.

Sitting with Jesus after breakfast, Peter has a come-to-Jesus moment. Jesus asks: do you love me more than this life you once knew? Do you love me more than safety and security, more than familiarity? Do you love me? Yes, yes, you know I love you! Feed my lambs; tend my sheep; feed my sheep. This is the future I have in mind, Peter, lead on the Way of Jesus.

It's certainly going to take you out of your comfort zone; it will surely be dangerous. It means a life of continual prayer and communication with God, of learning to recognize the signs of the living Christ in your midst, of being willing to shift directions or abandoning an idea when God leads you a different way.

What are the indicators that tell you Christ is present? There are surely others, but scripture suggests it may be something like a word of connection in a frantic moment like with Jesus and Mary at

the tomb; maybe a bizarre encounter that leaves you questioning what you thought you knew about the world; perhaps it is in remembering the story, with Jesus at the table breaking the bread; what about following a silly suggestion or performing a daring act of obedience that brings you fullness. As disciples God calls us to a life of service, each of us has a role, even our congregation has a role. Let us look and listen for the living Christ in our midst as we follow on the Way.