

Sermon Bingo

Can you find these words in the talk that follows?

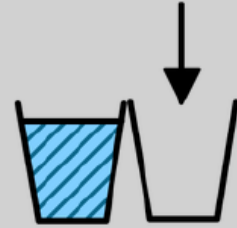
Bingo



Breakfast



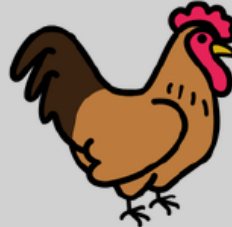
Serve



E m p t y



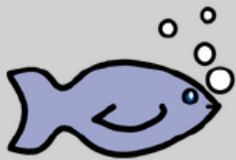
Journey



Cockerel



Choice



Fish



Forgiveness



Lambs



Sheep

3

Three



Bread

October 18th - Restoration

Peter was an ordinary man. He was raised as a fisherman, earning a living on the sea of Galilee. One day, seemingly out of the blue, Jesus called to him and his brother, "Follow Me. I will make you fish for men!"

Peter and his brother left their boat, left their nets and followed. Peter journeyed with Jesus, witnessed the miracles he performed and learnt from him. He responded to the challenge when Jesus sent his disciples out to tell others about him. He was with Jesus when he rode into Jerusalem. He shared in the bread and wine at the last supper.

And then, he let Jesus down.

Not once. Not twice. Three times.

Jesus had been arrested and was waiting to be tried. Peter was waiting in the courtyard. Three times, he was asked "are you with Jesus?" Three times, he denied it; "I don't know him."

And then, the cockerel crowed, and Peter knew he had let Jesus down, just when his friend needed him most. He went outside and "wept bitterly."

How must Peter have felt in that moment? His world had been turned upside down. His friend, his teacher, the man he recognised as the Messiah, had been arrested. In just a few short hours, Jesus would be crucified. And he, Peter, had let him down.

Of course, we know that isn't the end of the story. For just three days later, Peter was running to the empty tomb. He met with the risen Jesus, not once, but twice. And then came the morning when Jesus appeared to them the third time. How might Peter have felt? The knowledge that he had let Jesus down at the moment he his friend needed him most must have weighed heavy on his heart. Perhaps he didn't feel able to look Jesus in the eye.

They shared a breakfast of fish, and then Jesus addressed Peter:

"Do you love me?"

"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

He asked a second time:

"Do you love me?"

He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."

Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

Then a third time:

“Do you love me?”

Peter said, “Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you.”

Jesus said, “Feed my sheep.”

Peter was hurt, but surely, he saw the symmetry. He had denied knowing Jesus three times. Now Jesus was asking him three times, “do you love me?” Each time Peter answered “yes, of course I do.” And each time Jesus gave him a task to do: “Feed my lambs... Take care of my sheep... Feed my sheep.”

It was a powerful moment. Jesus, the risen Christ, sat with his friend, offering not just forgiveness, but restoration. The old, defeated, guilty Peter invited to become a leader in the new Church. For it was not that long ago that Jesus had referred to himself, saying “I am the good shepherd” and here he is, asking Peter to step into the role of shepherd to God's children. Peter was able to look Jesus in the eye, knowing he is fully forgiven.

It was the next step on a journey for Peter. One that started three years earlier with the words “follow me,” and would lead to a life of service.

All of us are like Peter at times. We speak without thinking, we let down our friends and we let down Jesus. We may not be sat, as Peter was, in that courtyard as Jesus awaited trial. Yet how many of us have never hidden our faith? How many of us have ignored opportunities to share it with others? We don't have to speak out to deny Christ, often the choice to keep quiet has the same result.

It is because of love, that Jesus went to the cross. It is because of love, that Peter could be forgiven and made new. It is because of love that we can be forgiven and made new. And it is because of love that we need to serve.

For love for Christ needs to be shown, not hidden away. It must lead us to a life of service, to a life of loving those we meet so that they might also come to know Jesus. What this looks like will be different for each of us, but the task Jesus gave to Peter is the instruction he gives us all today: “Take care of my sheep.”