Children, you have no fish, have you?

The disciples, led by Simon Peter, had gone fishing.

They were back in Galilee after an extraordinary few weeks in Jerusalem and they were probably feeling completely bewildered.

Every time they thought that they had got Jesus pinned down and moving forward on what seemed to them a blindingly obvious course of action, he did something unexpectedly different. The entry to Jerusalem – the start, they would have thought, of a kingly liberation from Roman oppression – didn’t meet their expectations at all.

Then came betrayal by one of their own, a trial at which Jesus refused to defend himself although given every opportunity to do so, their own cowardice - running away and in Peter’s case, denial that he even knew Jesus.

And then the cruelty and degradation of public execution. Surely Jesus with all that power, that track record of miracle working, those claims to be the son of God – he who has seen me has seen the Father – could have avoided all this.

And what were they to make of extraordinary early morning stories from the women who had gone to the tomb? Disbelief was the obvious conclusion, but there was a question that wouldn’t go away. If Jesus wasn’t in the tomb, where was he?

Then two appearances by Jesus recorded before this in John’s gospel – but not consistent presence with them.

Not only were they confused but they were probably also pretty angry with Jesus – they wanted him with them all the time just as they had had for three years – not this confusing and inconsistent behaviour.

So, they reverted to what they knew.

If they couldn’t be disciples or the most important people in a Jesus-led revolution, they’d be fishermen again.

As dawn broke, you can imagine Jesus standing on the shore looking on and thinking – all that teaching, all those miracles, all that time spent with them, all that I have done in my death and resurrection and the only thing they can think of doing is returning to how it all was before they met me.

But instead, Jesus, as He always does, looks at them with love and compassion.

The seven men in a boat were experienced fishermen. They were probably a bit rusty but they knew how to make a living from the sea. But, even though they had been fishing all night, they caught nothing. They must have cast their net dozens of times during the night – by morning they would have been cold, tired, demoralised – *we can’t even fish now* – and probably pretty grumpy.

And then Jesus enters the scene – engaging with them practically. Starting not with theology or rebuke or teaching or a motivational speech about the latest fishing technique but with loving, intensely practical action. Moving them on from no fish to an abundance of fish, making them breakfast – and making preparation of it a shared task. And then, but only then, being honest with Peter about his failure and, instead of condemning him, giving him hope and a future. Oh, and the prophetic promise that following Jesus would cost him everything including his life.
In early 2005, an interview candidate arrived in Coventry and, for the first time since childhood, came into this Cathedral. Evening Prayer in the Lady Chapel was about to commence and so he joined in. There was nothing unusual about the service but the intentional rhythm of prayer of which it was part and the stark beauty of the building impacted the candidate and prepared him well for the next 24 hours of interview process.

As you will have guessed, that candidate was me. From the very beginning of my time in Coventry, I have had the extraordinary privilege of serving this unique institution in a variety of ways - working closely with the Dean and Canons primarily on matters of finance and administration.

Over that time there have been many occasions when the Cathedral has been in the position of working very hard but having seemingly little to show for it – *Children, you have no fish have you.* Finance and the lack of it has been a constant theme. There have been several occasions when it looked like the money was going to completely run out and, to be honest, that is still a concern now.

But somehow, we haven’t collapsed. Somehow, the unexpected and unpredictable has happened and we have come through the storms – somewhat battered – but still here.

Somehow, we have cast our nets again, even when it felt illogical to do so and we have been saved from financial catastrophe – but at times it has been very close.

A week after this encounter on the sea shore, the disciples could have had two reactions to the miraculous catch of fish. They could have rationalised it – Jesus just got lucky – the boat was fairly close to shore and he could see the shoal of fish by the boat. Or, they could have concluded that relating to Jesus involves both our hard work and His inspiration and guidance and transformational involvement.

The catch of fish, large as it was, would not have set them up for life financially. *Give us this day our daily bread* speaks of on-going relationship with a Father who provides for us daily rather than enrolling us in some sort of divine bulk delivery scheme.

And that principle, working diligently ourselves whilst maintaining a daily, intimate relationship with a loving Father who delights in his children is one which needs to be our guiding principle both in our personal lives and our shared life as the people of God. We need to both cast our nets – carefully, regularly, expectantly and in doing so, be open to resources coming through our own efforts – personal giving, fund-raising, relationship building but also through the unexpected. All too often, we default to over emphasis on one or other of these pathways to the practical exclusion of the other. Both matter.

As I come to the end of my time in Coventry and my day-to-day involvement in the life of this Cathedral, I hope you will permit me three thoughts:

Firstly, don’t give up because the fishing is getting hard. This is an extraordinary place with a story that needs to be known throughout the world. But it is also a place with big challenges not least in our buildings and the fragility of our finances. But, if we truly believe that God has not given up on this Cathedral (and I hope we do), just as He has done time after time in the past, he will come through for us. Maybe not when we would like, maybe not as we would wish, maybe not in a way which feels wholly comfortable, but he will come through for us.

Secondly, continue on the journey of making the Cathedral a place of loving welcome for all. When Peter saw Jesus on the beach, he could have expected immediate rejection, harsh criticism for what he had done or punishment. Jesus does not shy away from helping Peter to face up to his failure but does so in the context of loving relationship. All too often, people keep away from Church because they see themselves as not good enough – *those people will never accept me with all my messiness of life.* Please continue to make the Cathedral a place of radial, non judgemental welcome.

Thirdly, hold onto those prophetic words from the prophet Haggai carved on a stone embedded in the wall of the ruins. And also the verses that come just before them. They are:

*My spirit abides among you; do not fear. For thus says the Lord of hosts: Once again, in a little while, I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land; and I will shake all the nations, so that the treasure of all*
nations shall come, and I will fill this house with splendour, says the Lord of hosts. The silver is mine, and the gold is mine, says the Lord of hosts. The latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former, says the Lord of hosts; and in this place I will give peace, says the Lord of hosts.

The Lord of Hosts has not given up on Coventry Cathedral. The journey to come is not going to be easy – there are some tough problems to crack - and there will be some bumps along the way but I’m utterly convinced that the latter splendour of this house shall be greater than the former. So, buckle up, it’s going to be an exciting ride.

Any management consultant would have told Jesus to sack the disciples after the resurrection. They had let him down, showed weakness at a time when strength was required, told lies and run away. But Jesus knew better. He knows that those who love Him can do anything in his strength. And, those who truly love him and truly love those to whom they are sent, know that His love does not depend on whether or not we are successes. All he asks is that we walk with him and do as he asks not in our own strength but in the strength that he gives us.

When Peter saw Jesus from the boat, he had a choice. Hide – hoping Jesus wouldn’t notice him or try to get to Jesus as fast as possible. Despite all of his failure, he put all his energy into pursuing Jesus. Intentionally moving towards him.

If Jesus came and stood in the Cathedral now, which way would you move?

Amen.