Liminal: living in the in-between #3

Restored for the future

w/c 11 May 2025

"If you give people facts without a story, they will explain it within their existing belief system. The best way to promote a new or different belief is not with facts, but with a story."
(Dave Gray, author of *Liminal Think*ing)

Read John 21:15–19

As we read these words at the end of John's gospel, we must bear in mind that Pentecost is yet to come. Jesus can only be where he is. It's different for us. He is with each of us, all the time; just as he promised. It's just that sometimes we don't recognise that presence.

Note that we lose much in the translation here. The first two times Jesus asks about love he uses *agape*[1]; Peter replies using *philia*; Jesus' third question is then framed using *philia*, to which Peter replies in the same form. If you can, read the passage in translations by JB Phillips or NT Wright which do acknowledge the difference. It feels quite shocking.

It's not easy to work out just where this episode fits into the post-resurrection timeline. Probably the best we can do is assume it immediately preceded the '40 days' mentioned by Luke in Acts 1:3. Anyway, by now the risen Jesus has already met Peter three times. There were the two episodes (John 20) that we have looked at over the past two weeks. And then there was the most tantalising of all – that mentioned in Luke 24:34. Why do you think Jesus left it till now to have this 'difficult conversation' rather than sorting it all out on the afternoon of the first Easter day?

It's one thing for Jesus to come up to you and have a quick chat as he does here. We need to think how this all can translate into our lives today. How do we help people back into wellbeing and wholeness? It's important I think to notice the one thing Jesus doesn't mention: the events of that fateful evening (Luke 22:54–62). Would we assume that that needed to be the centre of the discussion? Remember that Jesus seemed to have reserved his greatest anger for the religious leaders of his day – because, as he said of them, "*you load people down with burdens*" (Luke 11:46). In speaking with others, how can we help them to focus on their relationship with God and the onward journey and not dwell on the past; to focus on life, not sin?

Quite often the gospel is presented as an invitation for people to come **to** Jesus. The Bible seems to take a different view – it's to follow him (v19); to come **with** him. How do we ensure that our time with Jesus maintains that dynamic condition; that we journey with him, that we follow our calling from him? To work for Jesus is to not work alone as he outlined in the words recorded in Matthew 11:29-30. The yoke he talked of was far more (so commentators assure me) that used to join two oxen together while ploughing. It's not the 'over my shoulders to carry (all by myself) a pair of buckets' sort of yoke that too often gets portrayed. The invitation is for us to join him in his work, shoulder to shoulder. How can we ensure we keep that 'walking/working with Jesus' image central to our faith?

If you have time, look through **Psalm 51** – and make sure you include the introductory words preceding verse one. 2 Samuel 12 describes that meeting of David with Nathan. The psalm is David's response to the liminal point Nathan brings him to as he realises the wrong of what he has done. Be careful though to remember that the faith life of the old covenant is very different from that of the new. Romans 8:37-39 may give you a helpful anchor as you explore.

"Prayer does not change God, but it changes him who prays." (Soren Kierkegaard)

[1] *Agape* is the Greek word for the sacrificial love central to Christianity; *philia* is the corresponding term for close friendship.