

St Saviours, Lyttelton

Reading: John 21:1-15

Faithful God, open Scripture to us in a new and exciting way. In Jesus name.
Amen.

Today is a milestone moment in the life of this parish. As you welcome your new Vicar, John and his family Yaekco, Jo and Caeli. I have worked with John for two years and have enormous respect for him both as a priest and as a human being and also for his family. I am sure God has great things in store for you as you journey together.

I have a confession to make. It's a bit embarrassing really. But they say confession is good for the soul. So here goes. When I fly and I'm at the airport I hang around the door to the Koru Club hoping one of my friends will come along and invite me in. It's a forlorn hope because I don't have many friends. However, it has happened. "Would you like to come and join me?" he said, "I wasn't expecting that," I reply all humble. "Come on in Nick." Anyway, if you haven't been to the Koru Club it's like another world. There's free wifi and an all you can eat and drink buffet. The time on the board is in 12-hour clock so I can follow it. There are magazines you might like to actually read, not like those ones at the doctors. People talk in hushed tones and the loos have several hand towels.

This afternoon's Gospel Bible reading isn't set in the Koru Club but like the Koru Club it's about hospitality. It's set beside the sea. It could very easily have been happening in Lyttelton. Jesus has just risen from the dead and he is standing on the shore. It is daybreak. The disciples have gone back to their old ways catching fish and they do not recognise him.

So, Jesus takes the lead. "Hey guys, you haven't caught anything, have you?" They agree. "Try the other side." It's then that they begin to haul in so many fish that they just can't do it. And it's then they recognise Jesus. It's when

they have a super abundant catch that they know it's the Lord. The vast number of fish is so typical of Jesus and his super abundant love. Whether it's feeding 5000 with a kid's lunch or making 150 gallons of wine from water. Maybe he could see below the surface from the shore to the fish below. Jesus can always see below the surface!

Then he makes them breakfast - an act of simple hospitality. After a night's fishing the disciples surely are cold and hungry and tired. A stranger on the beach is transformed into the Lord as they share together. It's in a simple meal that the Lord is recognised. This has happened before. In bread broken and wine poured Jesus is always present.

It doesn't need to be the Koru Club. But hospitality is at the very heart of our Christian life.

Our openness to offer others hospitality can be a matter of life and death. I heard about a soldier returning from the Vietnam war. He called his parents from overseas. "Mum and Dad, I'm coming home, but I've a favour to ask. I have a friend and I'd like to bring home with me." "Sure," they replied, "we'd love to meet him."

"There's something you should know," the son continued, "he was hurt pretty bad in the fighting. He stepped on a land mine and lost an arm and a leg. He has nowhere else to go and I want him to come and live with us."

"I'm sorry to hear that son. Maybe we can help him find somewhere to live." Dad said.

"No, Mum and Dad, you don't understand, I want him to live with us."

"Son," said the father, "you don't know what you're asking. Someone with such a handicap would be a terrible burden on us. We have our own lives to live and we can't let something like this interfere with our lives. I think you should just come home and forget about this guy. He'll find a way to live on his own."

At that point the son hung up the phone. The parents heard nothing more from him. A few days later, however, they received a call from the police. Their son had died after falling from a building they were told. The police believed it was suicide.

The grief-stricken parents were taken to the morgue to identify the body of their son. They recognized him but to their horror they also discovered something they didn't know. Their son had only one arm and one leg. You see it was him who had been injured by a landmine, and he was testing out whether he would find a ready welcome at home.

Thankfully, however limited our love is, there is one whose love for us is unconditional. Someone who welcomes us regardless of how messed up we are. That person is Jesus. Our task is to be hospitable too.

I heard of one parish and it wasn't even that long ago that welcomed their new vicar. The service went well and he seemed nice enough but the next week something weird happened. The wardens were looking around for him at the beginning of the service and found him at the back. "You can't sit there," they said "you need to come up the front. Everyone is wanting to see you." "I have heard," said the vicar "that this is the seat reserved for the unmarried mothers of the parish." "Yes it is," said the annoyed and embarrassed wardens, "but your place is up the front." "No," he said, "I think I'll sit down here." For the next two weeks he took the service from the back sitting on the pew for the unmarried mums and their babies. After two weeks the congregation had had enough. The seat was removed. You can still go to that church but you won't find a separate seat for anyone. They all just mix in together.

Today we gather excited to be welcoming John. But as we gather mindful of the grace of hospitality, a grace that Jesus extends to all of us, a very interesting thing begins to happen. The more we learn how deep the love is that Jesus has for us, the more we want to extend it to others. We become like Peter. Jesus accepts the love we have but slowly and surely, we find ourselves being drawn into a deeper love for him and all people. Even the seafarers of all nations that come to our port.

In the meantime, you can find me hanging around the door to the Koru Club hoping to find some hospitality of my own.