

Jesus gives us a break.
Joh 21:1-19 Act 9:1-6 Psa 30 Rev 5:6-14

Meeting with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is a life-changing experience.

And it is an experience we all need
If we have not met with Jesus, then we cannot legitimately take the name of Christian.
The name *Christian*, means *Christ within*.
It means that we have taken on a new life. We have changed direction...

And that can be a very scary proposition.
Who wants to change direction, especially if life seems pretty comfortable already?

Today I want us to look at two people
who were just getting on with life as they had always known it...

One was very sure he was on the right track

The other had thought he was on the right track, but now didn't know what to think.

He had suffered bitter disappointment,
he'd had things happen which he couldn't explain,
he was certainly disappointed with himself,
and so he'd quietly slipped back to his former way of life.

His name was Peter.
He had spent two to three years with Jesus.
And at the end he denied that he had ever known him.
He watched him die on a cross.
Saw that Jesus had risen,

but was probably wondering what if any part he had to play in the future.
And now he was back at fishing on Galilee.

It was here that Jesus met with him.
Struggling to catch fish, and finding nothing.
(So often when people have known Jesus and turned back to old ways, they find the old ways are empty and unsatisfying.)
Peter's (and the other disciples' nets were certainly empty).
But Jesus comes on to the scene, and immediately makes a difference.
"Cast your net on the other side."
What had once been frustrating and unproductive activity suddenly turned into a bounty that they could hardly contain (153 fish!).

Jesus always makes a difference to the mundane things of life.
He adds life and dimension.
He adds meaning and fulfilment.

But there was more.
Peter, I imagine was still hung-over with guilt.
He had denied Jesus, not once, but three times!
Yes, he'd wept about that,
but he had no chance to put things right.

JESUS GIVES HIM A BREAK

Three times he asks Peter – do you love me, as if to give him the chance to cancel the three denials.
Then he gives him a job of pastoral leadership of the disciples.

Jesus turns a life of failure into one of responsibility.

It wouldn't be the last time that Peter would make mistakes, but he never denied his Lord again. In fact, later, he died for his faith in Jesus.

Jesus is right into forgiveness and giving people a fresh start.

SAUL was not confused.

He had not denied God.

And he was very sure that Jesus of Nazareth was an impostor, and that his followers were misguided and dangerous heretics.

He had stood by and approved of the Christian, Stephen, being stoned to death

And now he was on the road with authority to arrest and imprison the Christians at Damascus.

A man, sure of himself. Set on a mission of truth...

Suddenly finds himself blinded by a light, thrown to the ground...

(sometimes it takes something dramatic in life to shift people from their course)

He hears a voice... and you can bet that he's now ready to listen.

Saul... why are you persecuting me?

Who are you?

And the answer comes...

Jesus, whom you are persecuting

Jesus, who was Saul's arch enemy, is giving him an opportunity to discover the truth.

Mind you it had to be shoved in his face to see it.

Nevertheless, Jesus gives his enemy, who was headed in the wrong direction, a job of utmost responsibility, in taking the gospel message to the non-Jewish people.

If you follow both Peter and Paul's lives. They turn from something unproductive and even destructive to most productive lives for God.

You may say, "Well they were special people. Not everyone sees a blinding light, or has Jesus sit down to breakfast on the beach with them."

True, but he shows himself clearly in the records of these people. And when we receive him by faith, we see the changes he makes.

He is still turning lives around today...

In fact that is the resurrection message – out of death God brings new life

[It is in the symbolism of baptism

we have the opportunity to die to the old life and start over.]

Jesus is still turning humdrum lives into lives that will make a difference for eternity

He is turning enemies into those who both love and serve him

He is turning those who have ignored him, into people who can't get enough of him.

Greg is a man who turned away from Christ and finished up in prison.

It was there that he turned back to Christ

He began studying theology

And led the longest-serving prisoner to Christ.

And there is the nub of the Christian message.

The message of God's grace.

In Christ there is forgiveness for the past.

In the Holy Spirit there is genuine change that can take place in the individual.

When I was visiting Cessnock gaol the Anglican chaplain there had

been a prisoner himself. He had a past in drugs.
Normally people who have been in prison don't get jobs in the system.
But since he had given his life to Christ the change was so profound
that he became ordained, and then as chaplain he was influential in
bringing great changes to the gaol. Today he is a chaplain to the
chaplains.

Now you don't have to have been in prison to need a new start.
From time to time things I have said or done, or things that I have failed
to do come to mind, and I feel pangs of regret and remorse.
I then have to remind myself that those things have been forgiven.
That they are now in the past.
I don't think that I am Robinson Crusoe in that.
All of us can look back on our lives and wish that we could forget some
of things we did or didn't do. Every one of us has a past of some
sort.

The good news is that although *we* may have trouble forgetting the
past, God is more interested in what we can become in his hands.
In fact he can even use our past experiences for the good of others.
There is also an implication here that the Christian community should
be less concerned about labelling people for their past, and more
interested in recognising what people are *now* in their relationship
with Jesus Christ and encouraging them to be what they should be
for him.

SO – are you ready to make a fresh start?

Have YOU met with Jesus today?

You can!

Invite him into your life
Whatever your back ground
Whatever you've done or haven't done
It's not important whether you feel qualified (none of us is)

It doesn't matter if you don't know much about religion.
Or whether you do
– and have generally lived a good life.

Like Paul, your life can turn around and head in the direction that God
has for you. Your life can make a difference under God's guidance

Peter had already walked with Christ.
He had fallen away in a big way
And his turnaround was in the nature of a second chance.
A fresh opportunity.

Those of you who have already invited Jesus into your life.
Is it time for you to recommit to God's purposes for your life.

Are there things in your character that need to change?
Is the fruit of the Spirit evident within you?
Or has your Christian life fallen into a rut...
become dull and lifeless?
Have you stopped actively sharing Jesus with others?
Have you lost your passion for evangelism?
For building up your sisters and brothers in Christ?

It's a fresh encounter with Jesus that can make the difference.
To say again, "Yes Lord, I do love you."

Will you re-dedicate your life to Jesus today?
...and make a fresh start.

Why not take a few quiet moments to pray to either commit or
recommit to Jesus Christ and his purposes for your life.

[Prayer of repentance.

Father I am sorry for leaving you out of my life.

Forgive me for that and for the other wrong things that I have done.

I give my life to you.

Please give me your Holy Spirit and help me to be a true follower of your Son, Jesus Christ.

And I ask this in his name. Amen.]