

Nobody twenty years ago would have dared to predict the rapid, all-pervading success of the internet. It has revolutionised the ways we communicate, and as we are animals that are distinguished by the way we communicate, its effects have been profound and deep-reaching. For all its power to effect change, the internet has also acted as very effectively as a huge mirror held up in front of humanity. All that life can afford, to misappropriate Dr Johnson's famous phrase, is there, the good, the bad, the frankly kooky, and the downright scary. Back in the days when the world wide web was becoming a popular phenomenon, one of its great success stories was curiously enough, a site called Friends Reunited. It was designed to allow you to see what all those people you went to school with are doing now, and if you really wanted, to get in touch with them, a school reunion in etherspace. The site has long gone but the concept has been co-opted, pumped full of steroids and called Facebook. Facebook seeks to feed many of our social needs and insecurities: about being in the loop, of not missing out, yes: but also our desperation to turn the clock back.

Our progress down the stream of time is inexorable and unstoppable yet past a certain age we can usually be found trying desperately and always unsuccessfully to paddle back upriver or even just jam in an oar to make the boat stand still. Hundreds of thousands every year hit forty and hit a midlife crisis, desperately trying to claw back lost time and do all those things that they always should have done but were prevented from doing by children / careers/ marriage / having all the time in the world. Billions are spent each year by all ages on lotions and potions in the hope of reversing the effects of ageing on our skins, faces, teeth, hair, hands. So desperate are we for the purported anti-ageing effects of these unguents that when it was revealed that one of these creams actually worked there were riots in my home county of Yorkshire when the shelves ran empty. After all, life down the pit plays havoc with your complexion. About half of those who voted in 2016's referendum seemed to have been at least partially motivated by the thought that leaving the EU would turn the clock back to the good old days of pounds, ounces and bendy bananas. Presumably these are the people who have forgotten what those rickety days were actually like. Point is, from potions to politics we want to turn the clock back.

It is a strange preoccupation. Because even if it were possible for us to do absolutely nothing, we would change. We *are* all time travellers, but we can travel only in one direction and at one constant speed. Were we able to turn round and look back, it would not be as if we were cycling along a country lane. We would not see the path we have travelled receding gently into the distance, we would see nothing. When we travel in time, where we have been ceases to exist.

However, just for today, let us suspend disbelief- we are in church after all- and imagine that, yes, we can travel back in time. I'll just press the button and here we are, Galilee, 33AD, just before breakfast. We see the everyday scene of fisherman returning home after a difficult and unsuccessful night where the fish have been refusing to bite. It is a sight that has been seen on those shores for thousands of years and can still be seen to this day. You can read about it at the end of St John's gospel. It is an ancient equivalent of the 8:30 school run crawling on Croydon Road: nothing more unusual than the world going about her morning business as she always does. But with our insiders knowledge we know that this humdrum scene is in fact an astonishing sight. What we see is a moment that should profoundly shock us as much as, say, finding that Evensong has been replaced by an extended session of liturgical dance, or that the cash machine on Wallington High Street is giving out double money and everybody is standing round exercising restraint until the engineer fixes it.

What we see is an astonishing sight, because the fishermen we can see on the lake this morning are some of the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth- the Jesus of Nazareth who contrary to every previous experience of our species, has risen from the dead.

And what is so mind-bogglingly astonishing about this sight is we see this Jesus' followers engaged, even at this early stage in its history, in that favourite church activity of trying to turn back the clock. Here they are, back at their old jobs, acting as though nothing has happened. No miracles, no teaching, no Judean ministry, no Palm Sunday, cleansing the temple, last supper, trial, crucifixion, burial, resurrection. Nothing. Jesus promised he would make them fishers of men; now they are back to being fishers of fish.

Perhaps they have no idea what to do; there is no script after all, no guidebook for the correct procedure to be followed in the event of unexpected passion, crucifixion and resurrection. Perhaps they are anticipating the wartime injunction 'Keep Calm and Carry On' in the most conservative way possible. In chaos and confusion, turmoil and change it is only human to cling to what we know, to hold ever tighter to the familiar..

Perhaps the leader of this tatty-looking lot, the one laughingly dubbed 'Rock' by his master, perhaps Peter is paralysed by guilt. Because Peter when push came to shove, when he was asked to prove his mettle, when the hour called for courage, faithfulness, loyalty; when a solid and unmovable rock was needed, Peter crumbled and ran

away, more like sand falling through fingers than a rugged and reliable outcrop fit for foundations. In this situation it is quite understandable that Peter might want to pretend that the last three years never happened. Judas betrayed his master, Peter ran away. It would be no wonder, to enter into day time television speak, if he was in denial. Peter, after all is good at denial: three times the cock crowed, three times he denied Jesus. No shakes then if he adds a fourth denial now: easier perhaps for Peter to believe that none of it happened than to face the fact that he turned his back on his friend.

But things cannot go back, they can never go back. This is not about the laws of physics, about the physical impossibility of time travel. Peter cannot go back because Simon is now Peter: Peter has been changed. Peter will never again be Simple Simon the fisherman, he can never again be a simple fisherman. He can climb back into his boat, he can spend all his hours on the lake, he can doggedly cast out his nets and haul them back in, he can do all the things that constitute fishing...

...but he is no longer a fisherman.

He can say again and again and again till the rooster is blue in the face from all that crowing that he does not know Jesus...

...but he does, and he can never now not know Jesus.

The story continues. Jesus meets Peter on the shore. Peter has been unsuccessfully fishing all night and is met by Jesus already frying the fish for breakfast. It is a none too subtle way of telling Peter that he is no longer a fisherman.

And then Peter is confronted with his past: "Do you love me?" asks Jesus three times. And Peter finally admits that he does. He is a little reticent, perhaps a little shamefaced, as any of us might be in such a situation, but admit it he does. Peter has no more excuses, and he faces the truth he has been trying to run away from ever since it all went bad in Gethsemane.

Peter has not turned back the clock, he will always have denied Christ three times just as now he has thrice declared his love. But now he has the courage to face his calling, now he knows he has irrevocably changed, now there is only one answer he will give to the question 'Are you one of this man's disciples?' Yes. It will mean for Peter hardship, long struggle and finally his own death in Rome, executed because he

will refuse the easy option, to say 'I do not know him'. The answer will always now be 'yes'.

When we meet Jesus we are changed. It is an inevitable consequence of that meeting. It follows as surely as night follows day and day follows night, as surely as bank holidays bring planned engineering works, as surely as sunshine brings parking mayhem to Church Road.

And once that meeting has been made, once we have met the Risen Lord, we can never go back. God's Will will be done, even though we might spend most of our lives trying to make sure it isn't, fighting an unwinnable fight and always on the losing side.

We can expend a lot of effort denying that we are his disciples. We might drift out of this church, back into the world. We may stop coming to worship, forget to say our prayers. Our love for the Galilean may grow cooler and finally cold; we can even learn to ignore the cock crowing as we drift into the spiritual unconsciousness of numb secular lives. Hundreds of thousands already have.

But we have met Jesus. We have changed. We may spend most of our life in aimless drifting, but we will eventually hit landfall, and when we get to that shore Jesus will be there to remind us that we have met him.

And the first question on his lips will be "Do you love me?".