

## John 21: “Bringing your senses to the Breakfast on the Beach” All Age service

This service explores the scene in John 21 where Jesus meets the disciples on the beach around a fire. He makes them breakfast and he gives Peter a special job to do. The service is designed to use the senses of smell and touch to explore the story. It takes a bit of set up beforehand but it is worth it! Our sense of smell is one of our strongest memory triggers so my prayer is that people will remember this service long after they have forgotten the words. Credit to Elizabeth Singleton who led a devotion using these senses in the Auckland Scripture Union office years ago - and I remember it like it was yesterday!

### You will need:

- PowerPoint (optional)
- A video clip of a fire (see script for a suggested link)
- Trays or paper plates
- Pieces of charcoal (enough for one per 10 people)
- Loaves of fresh bread (enough for one per 10 people)
- Small fish (enough for one per 10 people)
- Wet wipes or wet cloths
- Volunteers of a range of ages to help hand out the objects

This service involves passing around the objects from the breakfast: the charcoal, the bread and the fish. The idea is for people to use their sense of smell and touch to explore the story. I used raw fish (for effect ☺ ) but you might like to use cooked fish. To ensure this doesn't take up too much time (i.e. one fish being passed around a whole church will use all your time up!) here are a couple of suggestions:

- Beforehand you will need to organise volunteers to pass the objects around.
- You will need pieces of charcoal, bread and fish - approx. 1 per 10 people. So, if you have 100 people in your service you will need 10 pieces of coal.
- It is simplest to get the congregation to pass them around using their hands. But, if you think some will cringe at this idea you may need to pass the objects on plates. Have some pieces of charcoal, bread and fish set out on plates for those who would like it. Have a couple of volunteers circulate these plates.

Note: the speaking parts are in *italics*.



### What and Why:

It is important to explain to people why you are using this approach, so they know what to expect and why.

*This morning I want us to explore an account in the Bible by using our senses. We are going to join Jesus' friends on the shore of the Sea of Galilee.*

*To do this we are going to use the sense of smell and touch in particular. We will be passing around some objects that play a part in the story, so this morning will give you a chance to 'get your hands on the story' so to speak.*

*The reason I have chosen this approach is not simply to be different but because our senses were made by God to help us to experience life. They help us connect to emotion and they help us remember. Did you know that the sense of smell is one of the strongest memory triggers for us?*

*As we go through the story I am going to stop along the way and give you a chance to smell and to taste and feel and see and hear the story. This is so we can enter into it and hear for ourselves what Jesus is saying to the disciples, and just perhaps discover that Jesus has something to say to us too.*

*Let's share this together, young, old, girls, boys, people who have heard this story lots of times before and those for whom it is new. Let's share it together and encourage each other to listen to God's voice this morning.*

### Introduction to the story:

PowerPoint - a photo of the Sea of Galilee at sunrise.

*Today we pick up our story after the events of Easter had taken place. The disciples are trying to move on with their lives. Back to their homes on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, back to their fishing boats. We join them after a lousy night's fishing, when they caught absolutely nothing. Not even a bite. We discover that Jesus shows up and turns this lousy fishing expedition into such a catch of fish that the nets can't handle the weight. Fish jumping everywhere.*

*Then the disciples realise that Jesus is standing on the shore. They hear a splash and Peter is over the side. He stops to put his cloths on first, as most fishermen in those days fished without clothes on, much easier when you spend your day jumping in and out of the water to clear your nets. So, fully clothed he swims to shore, leaving his friends to bring in their massive haul of fish.*

*Let's enter the story for ourselves at this point.*





## Fire:

**Video of a fire:** Have a video of a fire playing on the PowerPoint. I found one on YouTube that has a fire on a beach. It makes a great crackling sound too. Alternatively you could create a fake fire at the front of the church with wood, yellow and red cellophane and battery powered flickering candles.

YouTube clip: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qAkvsIKcbD0>

*On the shore is a fire. As your feet hit the stony shore of the lake you smell the smoke from the fire. Jesus has been up early and he has prepared something. A fire, a fire made of charcoal. Let's start there, with the charcoal. Because, the charcoal might not seem very important to mention but it actually is! John is telling us about it for a reason.*



**Charcoal:** Pass around the pieces of charcoal.

*Coming around the room are some pieces of charcoal. What I want you to do is to pick up a piece of coal in your hands and hold it for a bit before putting it back on the tray and passing the tray along to the next person. Then I want you to hold your hands so they don't touch your clothes and then smell your hands. **I'm going to give you a wet wipe at the end of all this so don't worry about the mess.***

*Smell your hands. Smell the charcoal. Does it remind you of something recent or something from when you were a child? What do you think of when you smell charcoal? You might like to share your thoughts with the people sitting next to you?*

**What do you think of when you smell charcoal?**



Give them a minute or two to share some of their ideas (either in small groups or with the whole church. This depends on how much time you have).

*Charcoal. For one person sitting on that beach the smell of charcoal brought back some pretty painful memories. Can you guess who didn't like the smell of charcoal? John wrote this account and he wanted us to notice something. The Greek word anthrakia is the word for charcoal and it is only found in one other place in the whole of the New Testament<sup>1</sup> - does anyone have any idea where else charcoal comes up in the New Testament?*

*It's found in John chapter 18, verse 18.*

(You could invite someone to read this passage for you or choose someone beforehand. Put these verses up on PowerPoint)

*<sup>15</sup> Simon Peter and another disciple were following Jesus. Because this disciple was known to the high priest, he went with Jesus into the high priest's courtyard, <sup>16</sup> but Peter had to wait outside at the door. The other disciple, who was known to the high priest, came back, spoke to the servant girl on duty there and brought Peter in.*

*<sup>17</sup> "You aren't one of this man's disciples too, are you?" she asked Peter. He replied, "I am not."*

*<sup>18</sup> It was cold, and the servants and officials stood around a fire (anthrakia) they had made to keep warm. Peter also was standing with them, warming himself.*

*It's the same word used for the courtyard fire where the servants of the high priest stood warming themselves through the chilly night of Jesus' trial. It was there that Peter denied Jesus. Three times. I wonder if Peter smelled the coal on his hands and remembered that night, not so many nights ago when he had denied that he had anything to do with Jesus at all?*

*Smell your hands. Do you smell the charcoal?*

*Does it smell like betrayal? Maybe not the matter of life and death betrayal of Peter? Nor the life and death decisions made by 147 Christian students in Kenya. But can you smell the times you kept silent when you should have spoken, and spoken when you should have stayed silent... when you didn't stand up for Jesus? But maybe we simply remember that we are not super Christians. That we make mistakes, that we bumble along trying our best but not ever really making it. That our faith gets watered down or complicated or irrelevant to our daily lives.*

*Are we much different than Peter?*

*If you feel a bit like Peter this morning than you are in good company, and the good news is that Jesus is taking Peter's betrayal and doing something about it.*

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.jesusjourneybook.com/day40>





**Bread:** Not only has Jesus got a fire going on the beach but he has bread! Take the bread as it comes around to you. Feel free to break it open and hold it in your hands. Smell it and then pass it on.

**What do you think of when you smell bread?**

Let them share some of their ideas.

*I wonder if the bread reminded Jesus' friends of another meal they had all eaten together? A meal when Jesus had held some bread in his hands and confused them all by talking about his body being like that bread. He told them that his body was going to be broken for them. It didn't make sense at the time. I wonder if the penny dropped as they took that bread from Jesus's hands a second time? Does this have something to do with the crucifixion? Every time you eat bread you will remember what I have done for you. I wonder if they noticed the scars in his hands as he passed the bread around to them all.*

*Smell your hands. We live in a broken world, we don't need to watch the news for more than 5 minutes to realise that. Does the bread remind us of the one who took all that brokenness so that we could be made into whole people again?*



**Fish:** *And then the fish. Jesus had already caught some fish that morning. As we pass the fish around smell the smell of the sea, feel the sliminess of the fish's scales.*

**What do you think of when you smell fish?**

Let them share some of their ideas.



*I wonder if Jesus' friends remembered the time when Jesus turned a couple of these fish into enough to feed a whole crowd of people? When Jesus provided what they needed? Did they remember that Jesus had told them, right back in the beginning, that he would teach them a new skill. Fishing for fish, sure. Fishing for people, that was a whole new adventure.*

*Do we remember this morning as we smell the fish on our hands of God's provision for us? That God can turn the impossible into the possible? Do we remember the task we are given to tell others that God provides for them too?*

*I want you to sit with the smell of that breakfast on your hands while I read the rest of the story from John's gospel. As I read, feel free to smell your hands, you can even close your eyes if you like. Imagine you are there, sitting with Jesus' friends by the fireside.*

*And then I will pass around the wet wipes so you can clean your hands!*

Read John 21:15 (You could display these words on a PowerPoint)

<sup>15</sup> *When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"*

*"Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you."*

*Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."*

<sup>16</sup> *Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"*

*He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you."*

*Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."*

<sup>17</sup> *The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"*

*Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you."*

*Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."*

**Pass around the wet wipes.**

Play some quiet music while passing around the wet wipes. (I used 'Take my Heart' by Jordan Biel - free to download from Noisetrade.com: <http://noisetrade.com/jordanbiel/instrumental-worship-music-volume> )

*When Jesus turned to Peter I wonder what went through his head? Oo oh... now I'm in trouble. But Jesus is in the business of putting people back together.*

*He asks Peter: "Do you love me?"*





*Not, "Will you try harder next time?"*

*Not, "Do you promise never to do that again?"*

*But, "Do you love me?"*

*Isn't this a most important question? It's not based on our performance or our ability to say the right thing at the right time. Just as well for Peter, and just as well for us.*

*Do you love me? Jesus asks Peter three times. One time for each time Peter denied Jesus around that fireside. Jesus chose this spot next to another fireside to wipe away the bad memory Peter had and replace it with a new one. He could have confronted Peter at any other spot but he chose here. Why? Because Jesus wanted Peter to smell the smoke and the charcoal and to remember. It's as if Jesus says:*

*Peter, remember how I called you on the shore of this very lake, and you gave up your fishing job to come and follow me. I taught you to fish for people instead. Remember how you promised to do great things, to never deny me and to defend me to the end? Remember that it was around a campfire like this that you failed.*

*Feed my sheep.*

*In this moment Jesus chooses Peter. He chooses Peter to care for his followers after he has gone. His failure didn't cancel him out. He chooses us too! Isn't that great news and a great challenge.*

*"God uses broken things. It takes broken soil to produce a crop, broken clouds to produce rain, broken grain to give bread, broken bread to give strength. It is the broken alabaster box that gives forth perfume . . . and it is Peter, weeping bitterly, who returns to greater power than ever." – Vance Havner <sup>55</sup>*

Close in prayer

Let us pray.

