



# Kaurihohore Historic Church

P O Box 4118, Kamo, Whangarei 0141



## Kaurihohore / Kamo Co-operating Parish Sunday 1 May 2022 – Easter 3



Swanson, John August. The Great Catch, from *Art in the Christian Tradition*, a project of the Vanderbilt Divinity Library, Nashville, TN. <https://diglib.library.vanderbilt.edu/act-imagelink.pl?RC=56550> [retrieved April 27, 2022]. Original source: [www.JohnAugustSwanson.com](http://www.JohnAugustSwanson.com) - copyright 1993 by John August Swanson.

***Our service today is led by Kimberley Nielsen, one of our Lay Preachers***

We are saddened that we are unable to welcome those into our midst who do not have Vaccine Passes. We will continue to provide emailed, posted or hand-delivered service outlines for those unable to participate in person, and also to find creative ways of doing Church so all are included in some way.

*Note: as people arrive there is a video playing on the screen of a small campfire on a beach, with a small fishing boat pulled up onto the sand in the background.*

*You can find the video here: [https://youtu.be/zv8yezvG\\_y8](https://youtu.be/zv8yezvG_y8)*

## **Welcome**

Morena, my name is Kimberley, and I am one of the lay preachers here and it is my privilege to welcome you to our church this morning. This morning we are running a wee competition to guess how many chocolate fish are in the jar. Hopefully you've made your guess, but if you missed out and you still want to have a go, Rory can come and see you now to record your guess. We'll announce the winner later on in the service. If you get it right, you'll win a big chocolate fish – the ones in the jar here are for our morning tea, so make sure you stay for a cup of tea or coffee after the service.

Let's begin with our Call to Worship.

## **Call to Worship**

You come to us, living God.

**You come to us in the still, small voice, and we listen.**

You come to us, living God.

**You come to us in a flash of insight, and we are amazed.**

You come to us, living God.

**You come to us when we least expect you, and we are surprised.**

You come to us, living God.

**You come to us in these moments of worship, and we rejoice.**

## **Opening Prayer**

Wisdom of God, come and dwell among us.

We gather to hear your word, and to sing your praise.

We come as we are, trusting your grace will perfect us.

Interrupt our lives with your vision of truth and love.

We praise you now and always. Amen.

Our Psalm this morning is Psalm 30. The Bible tells us this this Psalm was written in thanksgiving after recovery from a grave illness.

### **Hymn HFTC 260: Great is Your Faithfulness**

[https://youtu.be/mx\\_LyCxmHI](https://youtu.be/mx_LyCxmHI)

### **Prayer of Confession**

Loving God, we can be so sure that we know what is best. We head into life following our own dreams. Interrupt us with the blinding light of your grace, that we may gain new vision.

When despair and sadness overwhelm us, and when hope fails us, teach us to dance to the music of your love. Open us up, oh God, that we may see your path, walk in deeper faith, and be living witnesses of your glory. Amen.

### **Centring Words**

We think we know what will happen and how things will turn out. But then God surprises us. Trust the Spirit at work in you now. **Amen.**

### **Prayer of Preparation**

Interrupt our lives, O God.

Awaken us to your possibilities.

Surprise us and open our hearts to new directions.

Transform our hearts and minds, as we listen with anticipation for your word.

### **Readings**

- John 21:1-19
- Acts 9:1-20

### **Video – The Bible Project: The Apostle Paul, Acts 8-12**

<https://youtu.be/oiVAbkINtRU>

## **Sermon – A God who surprises us**

It had been a crazy few years for the disciples. Jesus had called them as his followers and, inexplicably, they'd just got up and gone with him. Jesus was primarily a teacher, but he'd also performed some miracles – turning water into wine; feeding over 5000 people using only 5 loaves and 2 fish; casting out demons; healing the blind, the sick, the lame; raising people from the dead – they'd seen some incredible stuff!

Jesus had told some relatable, yet head scratching, stories – the kingdom of heaven is like; there once was a man who – and he had some strange ideas – the last shall be first; sell all you have and give it to the poor... - he also could have done a better job at times when choosing who to eat with, but you know, as time went on, it seemed like, maybe he was on to something? And after the past 3 years of hanging out with Jesus, they had dared to believe that maybe, just maybe, he really was God's son. He didn't look the way they thought the promised messiah would – he was more loving, more servant like, more human – but there was just something about him, it really did seem maybe that God *had* come to live among God's people.

Then it all came crashing down – Jesus was killed, crucified, nailed to a cross. No one saw this coming. Well maybe they'd kind of seen this coming – you couldn't go around saying and doing the things Jesus did and expecting it to end happily. But he was God's son (probably) – he could have saved himself, right? Surely God wouldn't allow him to die, especially in such a painful and humiliating way. Maybe they'd got it wrong, maybe Jesus was just a regular guy who was good at telling stories... it was fun while it lasted, but they had to get back to their old lives again at some point... right?

And yet now, it appears that Jesus didn't die, or he did, but now he's alive again? Or a ghost? or something? First it was the women. Mary claimed she'd seen him in the garden. It must have been the gardener though, right? But where had Jesus' body gone?

Then later that same day, they were locked in a room. Afraid. They'd seen what had happened to Jesus, was the same thing going to happen to them too? What should they do next? The door was locked, and they were alone. But then they weren't, suddenly Jesus was there too, he talked to them, and then he was gone. And 8 days later, it happened again, the same thing – a locked room, Jesus appearing and talking to them. How could this be? Isn't he dead?!

Now the disciples are back home. We can assume they feel somewhat safe – they're out fishing, not locked in a room anymore. We don't know whether they're fishing due to necessity – you've got to eat, right? – or because they're returning to their previous jobs now that Jesus is gone, what else can they do?

This is where our gospel reading this morning picks up. Seven of the twelve disciples out fishing together overnight, not catching anything.

Do you ever wonder what they talked about on the boat that night? Did they sit in silence? Bonded over shared experiences, and the horror of witnessing your friend's crucifixion? Or, did they take the opportunity of being away from listening ears and concerned glances, to go back and forth, trying to figure out the last few years – what even happened? What is still happening? Is anything still happening, or is it all over? Was that it?

And Peter. Peter's got to be miserable, whether his friends know it or not. He'd been so passionate, so excited, so eager. But he'd messed up. He was so ashamed. He'd denied Jesus. Not once. Not twice. But three times. Even worse, this had happened the night before Jesus died. His mind played the scene over and over, sitting by the fire, 'aren't you one of this man's disciples?', 'no'; 'aren't you one of this man's disciples?', 'no'; 'Didn't I see you in the garden with him?', 'no'. He wished he'd been there for his friend, but instead, he was denying he even knew him. Just the smell of a woodfire made him feel sick with regret.

So, when a random man on the beach calls out to tell them to cast their net on the other side, they figure it can't hurt – what's the worst that can happen? They can't catch any less than they have already tonight. So they give it a go, and they catch so many fish! The net is heaving, they can't even pull it into the boat! This sparks a memory, and suddenly they realise who the man is, it's Jesus!

Peter is so eager to see him, he jumps straight out of the boat and starts swimming to shore. The rest of the disciples give up trying to bring the net into the boat, and just drag it behind them as they sail back toward land.

I can't help but wonder what's going through Peter's mind here, clearly, he's keen to see Jesus regardless of what's happened in the past. Maybe he's thinking of the story of the prodigal son, 'I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am not worthy to be called your friend. Make me like one of your hired servants.' Or maybe he's seen Jesus redeem people before – Zacchaeus, the woman caught in adultery – and he's daring to hope there's forgiveness for him too. But Jesus sitting him down next to a woodfire, cooking him breakfast, asking three times 'Peter, do you love me?', is a shot at redemption Peter could only have dreamed of.

Let's not forget the other six disciples, who are mentally, emotionally, and physically exhausted from the events of the last few weeks, on top of a full night's work. Jesus blesses them too – with fish, so many fish, 153 to be precise! Way more than they could possibly need. He cooks them breakfast – with different fish! Demonstrating once again the abundance of God's love for God's children. This is not a God who demands constant work and attention, rather he says to them, 'sit down, take a load off, let me look after you.'

Through Jesus' life, the story of Easter, and the resurrection of Jesus, we see time and again that God is a God who surprises us.

Our second New Testament reading this morning, the conversion of Saul, continues this theme. In the words of Tom Wright:

“We call this event a ‘conversion’, but it was more like a volcanic eruption, thunderstorm and tidal wave all coming together. If the death and resurrection of Jesus is the hinge on which the great door of history swung open at last, the conversion of Saul of Tarsus was the moment when all the ancient promises of God gathered themselves up, rolled themselves into a ball, and came hurtling through that open door and out into the wide world beyond.”

And as we saw in the video, Saul’s conversion is only the beginning – God continued to surprise his followers inviting unexpected people, including those previously thought of as ‘unclean,” to follow the way of Jesus – the sorcerer from Samaria; an Ethiopian eunuch travelling through the area on business; and Cornelius, the Roman Centurion, and his non-Jewish family.

In our Psalm today we read praise and thanksgiving written in response to God doing something surprising – healing a grave illness. This was evidently surprising, but also perhaps was something that had been asked for, days and nights spent pleading with God for healing. Saul’s conversion on the other hand is surprising to everyone, including Saul himself. This was not something Saul wanted, or invited, or asked for, and I find it hard to believe that Ananias and his friends in the church in Damascus had considered it as a possibility. So, through these two readings, we see that God’s surprises are sometimes wanted, yet unexpected; or unasked for, and unforeseen.

Saul’s conversion is not just a surprise that requires an answer from Saul, but it is also surprising to Ananias, and requires a response from him too. Did you know that this story in Acts 9 is the only time Ananias is mentioned in the Bible? Everything we know about him is in these few verses, which tell us that he was a believer, who knew how to listen for the voice of Jesus.

He was prepared to follow and obey Jesus' voice, and even though it seemed ridiculously dangerous, he went where he was sent and did what he was told. And he did it with love and grace and wisdom.

God still surprises us today, sometimes it's with answered prayer; sometimes with help we didn't yet know we needed, or letting us help someone else just at the right time; sometimes it's giving us a second chance when we really don't deserve one; and sometimes it's with kindness and rest, right when we need it the most. I'm sure some of you have stories of the way that God has surprised you in your own lives – I'd love to hear them sometime.

As I was writing this sermon, I remembered my mum's friend Val. Val had caught polio as a child and was in a wheelchair as a result. She lived with her elderly father in a flat on Park Ave. You might remember there was a big flood in Whangarei in the mid to late 90's. Val and her dad got flooded out and came to stay the night at our place while they figured out what to do next. Unbeknown to Val, her sister had planned a surprise visit from Australia, her flight just happened to land the day after the flooding. Val's sister was there to help sort things with the insurance company and clean up after the floods. The timing of her visit was perfect, so perfect in fact that God just had to be behind it.

I also remembered when Mike and I were living in Dunedin during the Christchurch earthquakes. A co-worker of mine had a daughter and baby grandson living in Christchurch. After the quake on 22 February 2011, the daughter was so traumatised and upset, that she put her son in the car and drove all the way to Dunedin. She didn't pack anything, she just had to get out. This was before we had children, but lots of our friends at church had babies, so I sent a quick email saying what had happened and asked that anyone who had suitable clothes or baby gear they could borrow to get in touch. Later that night I had a call from Kelly.

Kelly said she had a few bags of stuff ready and wanted to know the address as her husband was going out, and he could drop stuff off. I gave her the address, and she said, 'are you sure?' I repeated the address and said, 'that's the address she gave me'. There was a pause, and Kelly said, 'that house is right next door'.

When God does surprise us, whether it be by answering our prayers; showing us grace and forgiveness we don't think we deserve; giving us rest and comfort; calling us in a new direction; or asking us to do something that just seems crazy, how should we respond? Our readings this morning give us a few ideas:

- We could respond like the Psalmist – with praise and thanksgiving, thanking God for God's faithfulness.
- We could respond like Peter – gratefully accepting yet another chance to do better next time around.
- We could respond like the disciples – taking a moment to rest and enjoying good food with good friends.
- We could respond like Saul – with patience as we wait for the other pieces of God's plan to fall into place; and then with humility as we tell others of the things God has done for us and through us.
- We could respond like Ananias – with obedience, love, grace, and wisdom, despite the absurdity of what we may be asked to do.

May we become people who pay attention and respond to God's surprises.

Our next song will be a new one for you. It caused some controversy when released a few years ago, as it refers to God's love as "reckless". When we think of Jesus trusting Peter with feeding his sheep, mere weeks after Peter's denial of him; or Jesus calling Saul, the number one persecutor of the early church, to follow him, the word reckless doesn't feel entirely out of place. I have chosen it this morning as it ties into our theme of "a God who surprises us", talking about ways in which God behaves unexpectedly, even recklessly. You can stay seated as the video plays, feel free to sing along if you wish.

## Song – Reckless Love (Cory Asbury, Bethel Music)

<https://youtu.be/7GGJ8cyYNzQ>

### Prayer for the Offering

God, you have the power to transform the most unlikely people into influential witnesses. We dedicate ourselves to being open to the movement of the Holy Spirit and that we might be agents of healing and change in today's world. Use our gifts to show people your presence in their everyday lives. Help us to be a means for encountering the risen Christ in a broken world. Amen.

### Prayer of Intercession

Risen Jesus, in trust and hope we bring to you our prayers for all your people.

You choose as your sisters and brothers the hungry, the homeless and the refugee: hear our prayers for the people of the world. We pray for all whose lives are destroyed by brutality and oppression; for all who are victims of injustice and neglect. Teach us to share the rich bounty you provide, that we may feed your people who hunger for justice and peace.

Risen Jesus, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You choose as your witnesses those who have deserted, denied, and persecuted you: hear our prayers for your worldwide church. We pray for all pastors and teachers, for all who feed and tend your flock; for all whose love for you has been weak or faltering. Equip us for your service in the world, that we may feed your people who hunger to hear your good news.

Risen Jesus, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You choose as your companions those for whom society finds no place: hear our prayers for the people of this community. We pray for those from whom we turn away, those whom we reject or neglect; for all whom we love, for our families, our friends and ourselves.

Help us to build a community based on care and compassion, that we may feed your people who hunger for a place of acceptance and worth.

Risen Jesus, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You choose as your own the sick and the sad, the lost and the lonely: hear our prayers for all who are in need. We pray for all who grieve the loss of loved ones; for the friendless and the forgotten; for all who suffer from illness, confusion, or fear and for all who care for them. Show us how to share each other's pains, that we may feed your people who hunger for comfort in sickness and consolation in their grief.

Risen Jesus, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

You choose as your saints those of every language, tribe and nation: Hear our prayers for all who have died in your love. We remember your faithful people of every age, all who have given their lives in your service and all from this parish whose yearly memorial occurs at this time. As Peter and Paul heard your voice and answered your call, may we also love and serve you to our life's end, and come, with all your saints in glory, to worship you for ever and ever.

Risen Jesus, in your mercy, **hear our prayer.**

### **Song AA 59: He Came Singing Love**

[https://youtu.be/QGv\\_6PNCI\\_8](https://youtu.be/QGv_6PNCI_8)

### **Benediction/Blessing**

The Spirit of Christ says, "Get up and go."

Go and extend God's circle of love,

Go and offer a healing touch to the world,

Go and celebrate the Spirit's presence in all,

Go and expect to be surprised.

**Our eyes have been opened, and we are filled with new visions of the way.  
We will go where the Spirit of Christ leads.            Amen**