

[John 21:1-14](#)

Christians are a little too good at times at keeping God in a box. One of the ways we do that is we put him in a church box. The only place we think we'll encounter God is in a church setting.

But people who do that haven't read the Gospels very carefully. Much more of the action with Jesus is not at the synagogue or the Temple but in daily life.

And if the Resurrection (and the Ascension) make Jesus present everywhere then we can meet him at the breakfast table, at the shops, and at our place of work, as the disciples did here.

How do we feel about that? Are there times when we would rather he wasn't there? I remember a Christian businessman saying, 'On Sundays, my priorities are first, God, second, my family, and third, my work. On Mondays, those priorities are reversed.'

Does this truth make us feel uncomfortable, or is it good news? If, like that businessman, we're clearly uncomfortable with the prospect, reflect with me now, because actually, it's good news that the risen Lord is present everywhere, including work.

Firstly, the risen Lord is present to *guide our work*.

Peter and the lads are experienced fishermen. By going fishing at night they have opted for the time commonly accepted to be the most productive for fishermen in the Sea of Galilee. Yet they catch nothing. Not even some plankton.

Why on earth – apart from desperation – would they take instructions from Jesus, who had been a carpenter, not a fisherman? What does he know?

Well, he must know something, because one of those little unexplained details of the story is that he has already got some fish and is cooking them on the beach!

Of course, as readers of the Gospel, we know he's more than a carpenter, he's the Risen Lord. Those pesky fish that Peter and his friends are trying to catch are part of the creation he oversaw.

And furthermore, in that creation the human race was assigned work as a good thing, for it was part of the stewardship of creation under God which is the human calling.

So it makes complete sense that the risen Lord is interested in the disciples' fishing work. It isn't inferior because it's not overtly religious. It isn't inferior because this is what several of them left to follow Jesus. It's still valuable as part of what makes for a flourishing world as God designed it.

The same is true for us, whether we do paid work or whether we volunteer, whether we need the income, or whether in retirement we are free to dedicate our time to other causes.

Therefore our risen Lord has a genuine interest in our work, and that involves him guiding us in that as much as in any church decision. Our work is to be a matter for prayer as much as any other aspect of our lives.

Are there areas of our paid work or our volunteering where we are struggling? Have we thought that this was secular and not religious, and therefore not brought it to God? That would be a sad mistake.

You may be an employee or self-employed. You may be a business owner. Or you may be a student. Or you are using free time to make a difference as a volunteer. Jesus is risen and alive and cares about what you are doing. Don't be afraid to involve him. He wants to be involved.

So bring him that staffing decision. Bring him that knotty problem your lecturer set. Bring him the moral issue you're wrestling with. He is interested, and he is present to help.

Secondly, the risen Lord is present to *give purpose to our work*.

I once had a manager who was the sort of person who lived to work. This was a problem for most of her staff, who generally worked to live. The office was everything to Mrs Freeman, and she couldn't understand those who didn't see it that way.

Why were the rest of us different? Well, for a few, they had spouses who earned a lot more and so their earnings weren't a life and death issue. But for many, it was because work was not a place of fulfilment but of frustration or tedium. It certainly wasn't a fulfilling experience.

I think many people would identify with the latter group. We've replaced the Seven Dwarfs' song 'Hi ho, hi ho, it's off to work we go' with 'I owe, I owe, it's off to work I go.'

And as I've said to you before, I've had that same experience of frustration and tedium in the ministry just as I did in the office. Those who romantically look on at my work and think it must be some kind of uninterrupted heavenly bliss have never got close to a manse family.

I have also testified before that the Bible verse which just about kept me going during the worst of times was 1 Corinthians 15:58, the climax to Paul's great chapter on the Resurrection, where he says that a great consequence of Christ being risen from the dead is that our labour is not in vain.

If you remember the sin of Adam and Eve in Genesis 3, you will recall that when God finds them he pronounces various curses on them and the snake. One of those curses is that Adam will find work to be frustrating. The Good News of salvation in the Resurrection reverses this curse, just as it reverses our separation from God by sin.

We heard that promise when we also read [Isaiah 65:17-25](#) in the service:

²¹ They will build houses and dwell in them;
they will plant vineyards and eat their fruit.

²² No longer will they build houses and others live in them,
or plant and others eat.

For as the days of a tree,
so will be the days of my people;
my chosen ones will long enjoy
the work of their hands.

²³ They will not labour in vain,
nor will they bear children doomed to misfortune;
for they will be a people blessed by the Lord,
they and their descendants with them.

Surely Peter and his colleagues in the boat had a sense of this when they dragged their huge catch to shore. After the fruitlessness of the night, now their purpose was fulfilled. They had fish. They could sell fish. They could make a living.

Not everything will be put right now. The vision of complete fulfilment awaits the 'new heavens and new earth' of which Isaiah 65 and Revelation 21 speak. (Which implies, by the way, that there will be work to do in the life to come – but it will be fulfilling work.)

However, we can ask the risen Lord whose resurrection promises that coming new heavens and new earth to help us find purpose and meaning in what we are doing now. It may be the chance to serve. It may be creative management of the earth and its resources.

Sure, while sin lasts there will still be frustration. But as the new creation begins to poke through, the risen Lord will bring purpose and meaning to what we do. Let us ask him to make that clear for us.

Thirdly and finally, the risen Lord is present to *bless our work*.

One hundred and fifty-three fish! Bulging, over-filled, and heavy nets! This is clearly way more than a normal catch!

Over the centuries, various scholars have tried to find symbolic meaning or significance in the number 153, and maybe that's not surprising, given the many layers of meaning we often find in John's Gospel. However, those attempts have largely failed, and perhaps we just need to default to a simple explanation.

Somebody counted the fish. The risen Lord had blessed the work of his disciples' hands.

In Ephesians 3:20 the Apostle Paul tells that prayer can lead to God doing

Immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

There is no reason to confine that promise to church work. Paul places no such limit. And this story shows that we can seek God's blessing through the risen Christ in every part of life, including work such as paid employment, studies, and volunteering.

How significant might that be in the economic situation we are now facing? As prices increase at a rate we haven't seen for thirty years, as manufacturers' costs go up, and as household budgets get squeezed to the point where more families are having to make impossible choices, would this not be a great time to ask the risen Lord to bless our work?

So what are the needs of your employer, your educational institution, or your charity? Pray that the risen Lord will be present to bless.

Yes, let's increase the range of people and causes that we pray God will bless. Not churches and the sick, but all sorts of elements in society. As you walk

along the high street in the village, why not pray a blessing on the businesses? OK, there will be one or two whose business you will consider inappropriate for blessing, such as the betting shops, but why not pray that blessing?

The prophet Jeremiah told those Jews who were forcibly taken into Babylonian exile that they should 'seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which [God] has carried [them] into exile' (Jeremiah 29:7).

This makes for an interesting challenge: instead of complaining about our society, why don't we instead pray blessing upon it through the risen Christ?

In conclusion, because the risen Christ is present everywhere to bless we need to get rid of our old sacred/secular divide. Jesus doesn't see things like that. As one preacher once put it, 'The only thing that is secular is sin.'

No, see the whole creation as the arena for our risen Lord to be at work, because his Resurrection is the first sign of him making that entire creation new.

And let that vision of the Risen One who transformed the fishing expedition of his friends be one that inspires us to pray and to believe that he also wants to transform our work, our studies, our volunteering, our work in our homes families.

Because all of those are part of the creation he is renewing. Let's join him in his work – in prayer and in action.