Our theme today is: ‘Jesus calls us to use our skills and belongings to help others’. And we very much are reminded of how the men who were professional fishermen became Jesus first disciples and went onto to help many people to know of Jesus.

Our reading today (John 21 verses 1-19) makes for a great illustration of showing how Jesus in the closing verses of John’s gospel is still showing the disciples how they can make changes in their lives that will produce very positive results if they follow what he tells them to do.

At from verse 15, we have the lovely scene between Jesus and Peter, which is reminiscent of the time when after Jesus was arrested, when Peter was asked three times if he knew Jesus and 3 times Peter denied that he knew Jesus.

Here, Jesus asks Peter 3 times if he loves Jesus and Jesus asks Peter to look after his lambs and then Jesus asks Peter twice to look after his sheep.

Who are the lambs and the sheep?

The message of this bible reading I have linked to the life of the Tea and Chat Group, from when Tea and Chat started in the first year of me being at Bishops. (2010)

Over these next few months when I take the service I will be updating you about the different community projects I have been working with and explaining what will happen to them when I leave.

The ethos of Tea & Chat has been for the members (and there have been changes over the years to the membership) to try different things to bring about change. In no particular order – these different activities have included learning a new skill or develop an existing one, walking alongside others though the good times and the not so good times, helping others, having fun, caring for others, creating community, celebration, celebrating with song, painting, dancing, eating together at different occasions and going on visits. All coming under the banner of taking care of one another.

Taking care of the sheep .... we are all a bit older than lambs!!

Regrettably despite different pieces of work to change the fact, the makeup of the membership of this group has never been representative of the makeup of the community. I know there are isolated elderly people in this community who we have not been able to reach because of the language barrier. Sadly, despite applying for funding to pay for interpreters we have not been successful in accessing funding for this vital role.

Looking to the future, I have had conversations with the existing group members as part of my exit strategy work and they have agreed that they will continue to self-lead the group and continue to offer a programme of activities, as has been the practice of the group.

Equally the organiser for the Advice Surgery has offered to work with the group more closely than she has done to date to support the members.

A few months ago, I saw this short poem on the side of a minibus:

‘I hear and I forget. I see and I remember. I do and I understand’
The disciples did what Jesus told them and they gained understanding that Jesus knew how they could catch more fish. They went on to ‘catch’ people as they travelled the land sharing the good news of the Kingdom of God.

Over these last 9 years or so, members of Tea and Chat have done – they have used their skills and talents to offer hospitality to one another and to any newcomer to the group. They at times have been the face of the church to those who would never come to church on a Sunday. At the time of a member’s birthday – Helen gives a birthday blessing, showing that the love of God is close. The members have tried very hard to care for their fellow sheep.

I give great thanks for the many memories we have of Tea & Chat over the years as do I hope the current members have and pray for the future activities to come.’’