***Fishing on the Sea of Tiberias***

My wife and I spent Easter Week in 1991, which coincided with the week of

Unleavened Bread, at PenieI-by-Galilee, the wonderfully-located YMCA

guesthouse on the Lake Galilee shore on the north side of Tiberias. Two

nights during that week we were awoken in the early hours by strange

banging, accompanied by shouting and flashing of lights. Not far from the

shore we couldsee a small boat with two or three men in it. I found it quite

easy to forgive the fishermen the interruption to my sleep, because they had

given me such a vivid embodiment of stories in the Gospels such as that in

John 21 - which was indeed the set Gospel reading in the Church of

England Alternative Service Book on one of the days in question. It was quite

easy to imagine a character like Peter not caring two hoots whom he awoke

in the cause of making a catch.

The jovial co-manager of the guesthouse, Lev Bausch, was less amused

at the disturbance of his clients but he was able to explain puzzling features

of what was going on. First, banging with a plunger on the surface of the lake

is a standard way of scaring fish into the net which the fishermen have

already laid in the water. 'Catching human beings' as an alternative to

'catching fish' has always seemed a rather more uncomfortable metaphor

than its familiarity allows it to be. It is all the more so now I have seen

something of what is involved in Galilee fishing.

There was apparently a further background to the fishermen's going

about their task in what might seem a rather anti-social way. The inshore

fishing season was near its end. During the winter the fish are inclined to stay

near the lake shore, not least on the western side where there are a number

of warm springs. But Easter/Passover marks the turn of the seasons, and in

the summer the fish move to the middle of the lake, where they are not so

accessible to small boats. At this time of year, then, the fishermen are

anxiously making the most of the time. I recalled John 21 again. The scene

takes place at that time, at a moment not long after Passover and the first

Easter. Is one reason for the disciples' urgency the fact that they know that

the season for such fishing expeditions is almost over and is its failure

therefore a deeper disappointment?

Might it be, also, that the Lake is called simply the Sea of Tiberias here in

John 21 (alone), because the scene of the story is the Lake's western side, near

Tiberias, where those warm springs are? One may compare John 6:1, where

Jesus crosses 'to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tibenas)', but where

Codex Bezae - puzzled by the odd Greek - reads '... to the vicinity of Tiberias’.