

April 14, 2013

John 21:1-19

“The Breakfast Meeting”

The Rev. Peter Cook

21After these things, Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. 2Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. 3Simon Peter said to them, “I am going fishing.” They said to him, “We will go with you.” They went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing. 4Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. 5Jesus said to them, “Children, you have no fish, have you?” They answered him, “No.” 6He said to them, “Cast the net to the right side of the boat, and you will find some.” So they cast it, and now they were not able to haul it in because there were so many fish. 7That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, “It is the Lord!” When Simon Peter heard that it was the Lord, he put on some clothes, for he was naked, and jumped into the sea. 8But the other disciples came in the boat, dragging the net full of fish, for they were not far from the land, only about a hundred yards off. 9When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. 10Jesus said to them, “Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.” 11So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. 12Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.” Now none of the disciples dared to ask him, “Who are you?” because they knew it was the Lord. 13Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. 14This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, “Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my lambs.” 16A second time he said to him, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” He said to him, “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Tend my sheep.” 17He said to him the third time, “Simon son of John, do you love me?” Peter felt hurt because he said to him the third time, “Do you love me?” And he said to him, “Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you.” Jesus said to him, “Feed my sheep. 18Very truly, I tell you, when you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” 19(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, “Follow me.

Well, this morning we begin with a hard luck fish story. You see, the disciples had a very miserable night time fishing expedition where they caught nothing. Not a thing. They cast their net down into the deep waters and then did not even catch a single smelt or whatever dwells in the sea of Tiberius. So, they sat on the beach complaining, all the while just barely being able to

keep their eyes open. At that moment, they were approached by a strange man who appeared to them. He asked if the disciples might take him out in their boat and try to give the fishing another roll. I guess those disciples were pretty desperate to let this stranger go out with them after they pulled an all-nighter. Maybe they were star struck because they thought the stranger was someone like Babe Winkelman from the Babe Winkelman Good Fishing Show who could offer a little of his fishing magic. So they got into their boats with this guy. And when they were sailing on that quiet morning water, the stranger told them to cast their nets on the other side of their boat. And this time, their nets were filled with fish. They were so heavy. Amazing. Such abundance. Here were the disciples thinking they had nothing and there was going to be nothing. And, now they were overwhelmed by an enormous catch. When they got back to the shore, the stranger said to the disciples, come on let's celebrate. Come, let's have breakfast. And there on the beach, in the face of this abundance, eating bread and beautifully grilled fish, they discovered that the stranger in the boat with them was no stranger at all, but the risen Christ. But, the disciples were too scared out of their brains to ask who he was because they would have to admit that they were once again in Jesus' presence. And, this was Jesus' third appearance.

In looking at this story, I find myself wondering why the disciples were so scared and resistant. Why was it so difficult for them to accept the Christ in front of them? It might be that they, had, um, a little emotional baggage, to say the least. They had walked with Jesus through the most difficult of times. Under stress and political pressure, they left Jesus hanging on the cross. Some felt guilty. Some felt remorse. Some were too hesitant to get close again. Some did not want to get in another political tangle. Some might have even feared for their lives following such a subversive figure. It was hard for them to trust. The cost to follow Jesus had been just too great and they did not want to get involved. The breakfast was delicious but it was turning into an incredibly awkward moment. Awkward. Very, very, very awkward. How is it that you dine with someone you felt let you down? They were overwhelmed by the generosity accorded to them. All of this grace was just hard to handle when they felt so undeserving. The grace and abundance was hard to feel right receiving. Too much kindness that was hard to trust.

Actually, in our lives, we also can carry quite a bit of baggage. We get what the disciples were going through, do we not? In our churches. In our families. In our friendships. In our political lives. We have this way of accumulating marks on our souls which weigh heavy. We nurse grievances, grudges, and anger for days, months, years, and even a lifetime. They eat at us. You know how this goes. That phone call you just don't want to make, and put it off for another day. We see someone in the supermarket with whom we had tension, and we make sure we steer our cart to another check out aisle so we won't get into a conversation. We stay away from a church or an old friend because of what happened. A handful of complicated and not so pleasant e-mails pile up in our inbox that make it hard for us to breathe. Our memories run long as we think about old political fights. We run around with souls individually and collectively which are as empty as those nets after a bad night fishing. We have trouble trusting strangers even if they offer us kindness and a good breakfast.

The promise of the resurrection is that we all get a fresh start! The things we build up in our heads which might carry a false premise need to be checked out and reexamined. Sometimes, we bring a whole lifetime of church and family memories - good and bad - which affect how we see the world. In Christ, we are invited to look at our struggles in a new way. It was the apostle Paul who so powerfully reminds us that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Jesus at his breakfast meeting on the beach with the broken disciples was trying to get this point across.

During this Easter season, our church has found that breakfast meetings are proving to be a good way to make all things new. It's been nice to do the Person-to-Person Campaign visits in the wake of the resurrection. These are little epiphanies of the risen Christ. In our church, so many visits have been taking place and more are still planned. We have been breaking a lot of bread together and eating a lot of fish, figuratively speaking. There is a lot of abundance in these conversations where we celebrate what is good. Indeed, it's been a real blessing for all of us to hear some very positive comments. During these conversations, we can offer our candor without a lot of fear. It's been a chance to get to know people we thought we knew a whole lot better. We have also been able to reconnect with some people who have been away for a little while. For some, these visits have given us a way to open the door of our hearts even a little bit to let some love and grace in. For others, it has meant putting the past in some perspective in order to move forward. Somehow, the things which seemed so important in the past do not seem quite so important now. The point here is to remember that in our lives and in our world and in our church, we need to create a lot of breakfast spots where we can breathe and be in the presence of God and one another. The resurrection becomes real and the whole of creation is restored. May these gatherings be a foretaste of many more good conversations that are still yet to come for many years. They become signs of God's abundance.

In closing, it should be said that it was not until after breakfast that Jesus had the most difficult conversation of all. The conversation was with Peter who was trying to emphasize to Jesus that he still loved him. Even the most forgiving part of Jesus might have questioned Peter's sincerity. Jesus was pretty unsure about that because he had, in fact, experienced Peter denying that he knew Jesus on three occasions as Jesus was headed to the cross. Peter was the poster child for fair weather friends. The resurrected Christ, in responding to Peter, seemed to say that love is not just a feeling or an affection. It means doing something. Go feed my sheep, Jesus said. If you love me, Peter, feed my sheep. To love Christ, means to do your best to use the gifts God has given to you to enrich the world around you and to feed a lot of sheep with your words and your actions. And, Jesus wants us to know that our work can begin now. You don't have to have your emotional world all squared before you can serve. You do not have to have a perfect theology before you can serve. You do not have to have a perfect moral record before you can serve. Your nouns and your verbs don't have to match to serve. You do not have to have a perfect church organization before you can serve. You do not have to be free of arthritis and

aches and pains to serve. You don't have to have a fancy bank account to serve. You don't need a fancy degree or title to serve. If all these things were required, Peter would have never served and the church would have never had its birth. So, if Peter can do it, so can you. You just need to have the desire to enlarge your heart and offer yourself with a generosity of spirit. And, if you can't imagine what you should do or imagine where you will find the energy to do it, the resurrected Christ will be carrying you anyway, making all things new.