

Sermon: "Breakfast on the Beach"
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Olivet Congregational Church, UCC
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John 21: 1-19

After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. Simon 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.

Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' He 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. That 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 lake. But 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.

When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. Jesus said to them, 'Bring some of the fish that you have just caught.' So Simon Peter went aboard and hauled the net ashore, full of large fish, a hundred and fifty-three of them; and though there were so many, the net was not torn. Jesus 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. Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

When 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.’ A 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.’ He 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. Very 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.’ (He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, ‘Follow me.’

Sermon: “Breakfast on the Beach”

I have fond memories of Saturday morning breakfasts growing up. Now, I don’t recall what we had to eat. I don’t even recall the topics at the breakfast table those mornings. I do recall that my grandmother, who lived upstairs, would come downstairs and sit with us. We would linger at the table – my parents and grandmother drinking coffee, us kids finishing our food and staying at the table for this time together. Both of my parents worked full time; both of my grandparents as well. So Saturday mornings were the only day we could linger at the table. It was together time. Those breakfasts helped build the relationship we shared with my grandmother – a relationship of love.

In our scripture reading this morning, Jesus is serving breakfast on the beach. The risen Jesus. And the menu is bread and fish, prepared over a charcoal fire. Do you think that the menu jogged the disciples’ memories, that they recalled Jesus multiplying the bread and the fish to feed the 5000?

I imagine that the charcoal fire jogged Peter’s memory. The last time, in John’s gospel, that Peter was beside a charcoal fire was when he denied being one of Jesus’ disciples when Jesus was being interrogated and Peter was in the courtyard of the high priest.

I imagine that a lot of memories had come up in the earlier hours of that morning, as Peter and the disciples were in their fishing boat all night– not catching any fish. The fish weren't biting. The fish were quiet. But I imagine the disciples' minds were busy, maybe even racing.

Jesus, their Rabbi, their beloved friend, had been crucified and died. But Jesus had appeared to Mary Magdalene and then to the disciples in a room with the doors closed. They had seen his scars. He had offered them peace. It was Jesus, but he was not the same.

They were still processing. It was a lot to take in. They didn't really understand what all this meant for them. Their lives would not be the same. They did not have this radical preacher, teacher, and healer to follow around the Judean countryside. Were their lives at risk for being his followers? What were they supposed to do? How do you follow a crucified Jesus who had died yet shows up in a room with locked doors; who was not present as he had always been? Who would not be physically there with them? That's a lot to think about. That's a lot of questions...

So Peter and some of the disciples had returned to what they did know. Peter said, "I am going fishing." And Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples said, "We are going with you." Maybe they wanted to return to their pre- Jesus lives. Maybe they needed to go back to something familiar, to feel grounded or in control. We don't know if their time in the boat led to conversation or insights, but we know it didn't yield any fish. At least not until Jesus showed up on the beach. And then there was an abundance of fish.

After a night of fishless fishing, a stranger appeared on the beach. He called out to them and told them to cast their nets over the right side of the boat. We don't know if they questioned the man's wisdom, but they did as he suggested. When the disciples cast their nets over the right side of the boat, as the stranger had suggested, the nets filled with fish. There were so many fish that the boat almost sank, we are told 153 fish, a huge number. And in listening to his words, in following his command, in experiencing abundance – the disciple that Jesus loved said out loud. "It is the Lord!"

Where Jesus is, there is abundance. Whether it is turning water into wine at a wedding or feeding thousands who had come to hear him preach or healing crowds of people or welcoming outcasts or forgiving those who had crucified him and criminals on the cross - abundant wine, abundant food, abundant healing, abundant welcome, abundant forgiveness- with Jesus there is abundance.

In the abundance, they recognized Jesus. Jesus was with his disciples again, inviting them to breakfast. Jesus was serving his friends from that abundant catch of fish and bread that morning on the beach.

The disciples knew it was Jesus. But they didn't know what to say. So they sat without speaking. Then Jesus moved beyond the nourishment of fish and bread, to relationship, healing and commissioning.

Jesus spoke directly to Peter. Three times Jesus asked Peter if he loved him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' And Peter replied, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' These questions were a painful reminder to Peter that he had denied being one of Jesus' disciples three times while in the courtyard of the high priest. Responding to Jesus' questions, asserting three times that he loved Jesus and that Jesus knew that, Peter was able to redeem himself. Jesus had given Peter that opportunity.

But Jesus did more. Jesus told Peter what it was that he was to do to demonstrate that love, to live out that love. Jesus told Peter to, "Feed my lambs.' ... 'Tend my sheep.' ... 'Feed my sheep.'"

The risen Jesus was still the Good Shepherd. The risen Jesus was passing on the mantle to Peter, to become the shepherd. The Jesus of abundance, who filled the nets with fish, the Jesus who served breakfast and nourished his disciples, the Jesus who spoke of looking for one lost sheep, had given Peter – who had lost his way in the high priest's courtyard - the chance to affirm his love for Jesus. And the risen Lord was connecting love for him with caring for his beloved sheep. Jesus was sending Peter out to shepherd his flock – to feed and tend his sheep.

Now, Jesus had called Peter by name in the presence of the other disciples, some of whom had fled when Jesus was taken to the high priest. When Peter denied Jesus in that courtyard, some of them were not even present to deny being his disciples. They too had failed Jesus as he was approaching his death. Jesus was speaking to them also. Jesus was asserting that, in loving him, they were being

sent out to serve – all of them. Love of Jesus and serving his sheep were intimately connected.

Those men who had been in that fishing boat overnight, who did not know what to do after their Rabbi had died, who had returned to what they knew, had just been given direction and purpose. They had been given a commission to shepherd Jesus' sheep – the hungry, the sick, the stranger, the outcast, the lost, the sinner – everyone. If they loved Jesus, they were to become like him.

That was the commission given by Jesus that day; to his disciples then and to his disciples now. That was the direction given to those who had been followers of Jesus before he died but had also failed Jesus as he was led to his death, imperfect individuals who had loved their Lord but had struggled and failed to fully live out that love. That commission has been given to us, imperfect people who profess to love Jesus but likewise fail as disciples at times. But that's ok. Jesus has always and will always use imperfect people to spread his message of love.

The call to discipleship connects loving Jesus with feeding and tending his sheep. Jesus offers his disciples then and us now abundance. Our Risen Lord offers us the abundance of his love and forgiveness and the abundance of new life in him. He feeds and nourishes us at his table. He then sends us out into the world to tend his sheep, to offer all people his abundant love.

Jesus shared breakfast on the beach with his friends, those with whom he had a relationship of love. Many, many years ago, I shared breakfasts with my grandmother at my parent's kitchen table. It was part of our relationship of love. While I do not remember the conversations, I do remember the love and I hold that in my heart. While I was not on the beach with Jesus and his disciples, while I am not perfect – like his disciples - I am invited into relationship of love with Jesus. We all are. But when I recall the story of breakfast on the beach with Jesus, I can almost hear his words –

“Lisa, do you love me? Feed my sheep. Tend my sheep.” And I hold that in my heart.

How about you?

