

Green Hill Presbyterian Church
“First Breakfast”
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Lessons: Acts 9: 1-20; John 21: 1-19

When we first moved to Delaware, one of the first things we did was to explore good breakfast spots. We discovered places like Kozy Korner and Angelo’s Luncheonette, De La Coeur and Lucky’s Coffee Shop and one special day a family in this church introduced me to Mary’s Country Kitchen. What a great time we had there. There is something incredibly wonderful about a good breakfast; it isn’t by mistake that the men’s bible study meets at IHOP for their good breakfasts. I thought of all these breakfast places and so many other special breakfasts across the years as I read through our gospel lesson today about Jesus cooking breakfast for the disciples on the beach by the Sea of Galilee.

After the crucifixion, they had seen Jesus. They had shared the unbelievable news that he was risen, and yet they had some trouble keeping that news alive. First, they heard from the women that he was alive, and they retreated behind locked doors. The locks couldn’t keep Jesus out and they experienced him for themselves, and they told Thomas all about it. He didn’t believe, so a week later, as they continued to hide behind locked doors, Jesus appeared again. If you were playing close attention last week, you might have thought the book was over because John seems to offer a wonderful ending. John does something we preachers sometimes do. He comes to an ending point; his listeners think the sermon is over, and he continues on with a little bit more. What we learn is that the disciples get out from behind their locked doors and they make their way back home. They go back to what they were doing before they ever met Jesus. They go back to their old lives.

Fred Craddock suggests that they were “unable to sustain Easter beyond resurrection appearances. Belief in resurrection was an item of faith but it had not been translated into life and mission into the world. The radical decline in church attendance and activity after Easter Sunday indicates the problem is still with us.”¹ These disciples head back home and get back to doing the thing they know best: they go fishing. They do what many of us have done following a great loss, we simply go back to what we know best, to what we have always done, to what we did before deciding to follow this carpenter and then being disappointed because he wasn’t who we hoped he would be. Going fishing is our way of trying to lessen some part of the loss, the hurt, the disappointment we carry.

The disciples go fishing and they don’t catch anything. Time after time the nets come back empty, as empty as their hearts. And that, writes Barbara Brown Taylor, “is when they hear him. They cannot see him, but they can hear him, someone, calling out to them across the water, guessing the truth--that they have no fish--and suggesting that they try the other side of the boat. So they do, and the water begins to boil, all at once so dense with fish that some of them are pushed right out of the water, their shiny fins glinting in the morning light. It is *deja vu* again: the boats, the nets, the stranger calling out to them. It is not the end after all, or else the end has led them back to the beginning again.”²

They race to the beach, Peter swimming in ahead of the boats and there they find the Lord, preparing breakfast for them all. The last meal they had eaten together had been supper, before all the tragic events took place. But here, on the beach, at the crack of dawn, with the new day before them,

¹ Fred Craddock, Third Sunday of Easter, John 21:1-19 in Preaching Through the Christian Year, Bloomsbury Publishing © 1994.

² Barbara Brown Taylor, The First Breakfast in Gospel Medicine, Cowley Publications © 1995.

Jesus offers not a Last Supper, but rather their first breakfast. He has turned their mourning into dancing. He meets them where they are, in the reality of their sorrow, and turns tears into joy. A new day has begun.

That continues to be our proclamation. In a world that is too full of anger, disappointment, pain, disillusionment, of hearts that are broken or empty, Jesus still appears. When our nets are as empty as our hearts, he tells us to try the other side. Cast your net in another place. Try something new and following his direction, our meager efforts are transformed into an extraordinary abundance. We discover new life, new beginnings, new opportunities.

Jesus still walks on our beaches and into our lives and more often than not we do not recognize him. "He comes to us," Albert Schweitzer described, "as one unknown, without a name, as of old, by the lake-side, he came to those men who knew him not. He speaks to us the same word: 'Follow thou me!' and sets us to the tasks which he has to fulfill for our time. He commands. And to those who obey him, whether they be wise or simple, he will reveal himself in the toils, the conflicts, the suffering which they will pass through in his fellowship, and, as an ineffable mystery, they shall learn in their own experience who he is."³

In our own experience, we learn who he is. It may be different for each of us, but that familiar stranger continues to walk in our midst. When you spend a sleepless night where nothing works, where no fish are caught, where your heart is as empty as the nets, weighed down by your own troubles and pain, pay attention. Listen. Here, and precisely here, is where Christ most often appears, the familiar stranger in that foggy, strange, darkest before dawn time, calling out to us, and welcoming us to share a meal, a simple feast, a breakfast where our former pain is not denied, but where we can celebrate a whole new day dawning. There we can discover a new beginning, a new strength, a new hope, where our nets and hearts are full again. "Come," Jesus says, "Come and have breakfast."

Let us pray: Always loving God, come into our lives and turn our mourning into dancing. Come into our distress and trouble and surround us with your never-failing love. Lift the shadows of our despair and usher in the dawn. Fill us with your resurrection power, that we might once again stand tall to share your love and feed your flock; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

³ Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, Macmillan Co. 1910.