

Breakfast with Jesus

John 21:1-19

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As the last chapter of the gospel of John opens, we find ourselves no longer in Jerusalem, but on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. It's back home for Jesus' disciples, back where it all started. You have to wonder what they are doing back there. Have they given up and gone back to their old jobs? Or are they just waiting, recuperating after the crazy couple of weeks they went through in Jerusalem? We don't know.

Simon Peter, the leader of the gang, decides to go fishing. I'm not just sitting around here waiting for food to drop out of the sky. A man's got to make a living. The other six Jesus-followers went with him. But alas, even though they went out really early, in the middle of the night, they didn't catch a thing.

Now it was just after sunrise. The fishing boat was in shallow water close in, only a hundred yards from the shore. This is a freshwater lake without the sound of waves, but there is a small sandy beach. The fishermen see someone standing on the beach watching them. "Hey, boys," he yells out. "Not catching anything?"

"Nah," they answer.

"Try throwing a cast net over the right side of the boat. I think you'll find some fish there." Maybe the guy has spotted a school moving our way. We might as well give it a try, one more time. The net starts to sink into the water, pulled down by weights, and the fishermen start to draw it back to the boat. But this time it's heavy. "Hey, give me a hand here! I can't believe this. What is this, some kind of miracle?"

Just then John looks at the man standing on the beach and says, "It's the Lord!"—it's our Master, it's Jesus! Simon Peter looks up and sees Jesus, and realizes that he is only wearing his tidy whities for fishing because they have to get in and out of the water to check the nets. He can't meet the Messiah dressed like that. So in a big hurry he gets his clothes on—then proceeds to jump in the water to swim to Jesus! I think it's *supposed* to be funny, and in character for bold, impulsive Peter. The other disciples just row their boat ashore like sensible men.

Now this is the cool part: when they get to the beach, Jesus is already cooking breakfast for them. He has a charcoal fire going, with fish on it and some flatbread being grilled. You may not think of fish for breakfast, but Israelis do, to this day. There are no chicken eggs in the Bible, and there is no bacon. Fish and bread is the bacon and eggs of these guys.

Just think about it. Here is the one who has been raised from the dead, declared by God to be Lord and Messiah. And here he is cooking breakfast like Todd Tremble last Sunday. Sometimes in art and in imagination Jesus goes from the humble guy washing feet to the Ruler of the Universe in one leap, like Clark Kent turning into Superman. The Risen Christ is often seen as the one who sits on the throne, and in Christian imagination he looked a lot like Caesar or other kings they have known. He used to be so nice, but now he's turned into God, and God is kind of strict and all-powerful, someone to be at least a little afraid of.

But that's not the way it really is. Jesus rises from the dead, and he's still the guy who washed our feet. He is still meek and lowly of heart. After doing the unthinkable for us, bearing the unbearable, he still acts as if he owes us, cooking breakfast for us. Of course it's not that he owes us anything. It's that he loves us.

Of all the holy and amazing things you might expect Jesus to say to his followers after he rose from the dead—especially after they had all given up on him and run away—“Come have breakfast” is not among them. That’s why this is such a great story.

Now the risen Jesus is powerful. He still works miracles. This is just down the coast from the hillside where he fed 5000 people with fish and bread, and now he shows that he’s still got it, feeding these seven fishermen with the same stuff. And of course, there’s that catch of fish. When they finally haul the net ashore they put the fish in a little holding tank next to the beach. And somebody decides to count them. 153! And they’re big ones! It is a reminder that Jesus can provide what we need, and then some.

We read in this story that “Jesus showed himself.” It doesn’t seem that Jesus is just walking around like a regular Joe and people spot him from time to time. Jesus decides to reveal himself to people, and that’s the only time he is seen. The first time, in John’s gospel, he showed up in a locked room and said “Peace be with you. As the Father sent me into the world, in the same way I am sending you out into the world.” The second time he showed himself it was to Thomas, the disciple who could not believe. Again Jesus showed up in a locked room and said, “Peace be with you,” then he told Thomas to touch his wounds.

And now the third time, Jesus shows up on the beach and says “Come have breakfast.” I think Jesus is more like your Mama than you expected. “Come have breakfast, child.” We have come here this morning hoping that Jesus will show himself to us in some way. To help you enter into the experience we are going to give you a little taste of fish for breakfast. Taste and see that the Lord is good. He cares about you and wants to feed you. He wants fellowship with you at this meal. Come have breakfast.

Do You Love Me?

One thing I want you to know about the conversation between Jesus and Peter is that there are two charcoal fires in the Gospel of John. The first fire is the one that Peter stands around warming his hands by very late Thursday night after Jesus has been arrested. It is outside the entrance to the high priest’s residence; Jesus is being questioned in the courtyard inside. Three times someone suspects that Peter is a disciple of Jesus, and three times—to save his own life, Peter denies it. He just keeps on warming his hands around the charcoal fire with some slaves and policemen.

Now there is a second charcoal fire. This time it is a fire built by Jesus himself—maybe on purpose? And after the disciples have shared breakfast, Jesus pulls Simon Peter aside and asks him three times, “Do you love me?” He does not ask it casually. He begins each time, “Simon, son of John.” That’s using his full formal name, *Shimon bar Yoanes*. You remember what it meant when your mother called you by your full name. You’d know it was serious if I said, “Patrick Tengwall, do you support me or not?”

So Jesus asking for a formal commitment, like a minister at a wedding asking “Will you take this man to be your husband?” And Jesus asks him three times. You denied me three times, so now I will allow you to undo that by proclaiming three times that you *do* love me. Jesus is not asking because he does not know, as Simon himself recognizes. He is asking so that Simon can be restored and their relationship healed.

But did you notice what Jesus says to Peter each time he professes his love? OK, if you love me, then feed my lambs, tend my sheep, feed my sheep. In Aramaic Jesus may very well have said the same thing three times, but John loves to use Greek synonyms for variety. In any

case, they all mean the same thing. If you love me, you will keep my commandment. And the commandment I have given you is to love one another as I have loved you.

No doubt Peter is being given a leadership role here—in spite of his utter failure in a time of crisis. But his role is to be a leader in love and in providing care for other followers of Jesus. Then Jesus spells out what this will ultimately mean for Peter. “When you were young, you used to fasten your own belt and go wherever you wished.” In fact, Peter has just done that, before he jumped out of the boat he “girded himself,” fastened his belt over his clothes. “But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.” Someday, Peter, you too will be taken prisoner as I was. They will shackle you and tie you up. They will take you to places you would never want to go, and one day they will stretch out your hands on a cross and drive nails through them. Early tradition says that when the Romans took Peter to crucify him he had one request. He was not worthy to be crucified in the manner of his Lord, so he asked that he be crucified upside down.

Jesus’ last words to Peter are the same as his first words to him early in the gospel, “Follow me.” This is what love means. These three things are the same: loving Jesus, taking care of church members, and living as Jesus lived. No one can say he loves Jesus if he does not show love to his brothers and sisters in the church. No one can say he loves Jesus if she does not live the way Jesus lived his life, doing what Jesus did.

Knowing all of that, we hear the question from Jesus coming from the page into our own hearts: Do you love me? Do you love me? Do you love me?