

“Come and Have Breakfast”  
Presbyterian Church in Sudbury  
John 21:1-19

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Last Sunday, it sure sounded like we had reached the end of the Gospel of John. After reading of Jesus' appearance to Thomas in a house in Jerusalem, chapter 20 closes with these two verses:

<sup>30</sup>*Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book.* <sup>31</sup>*But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name.*

For me, that invites an “Amen,” end of story, time to move on, ready to go home. Yet, just as a concert can have an encore, or a play an epilogue, we turn the page and realize John is not finished. As the curtain reopens on chapter 21, at least seven of Jesus' disciples had left Jerusalem and gone back home to Galilee, and back to fishing.

Before we hear of the great fish catch and a breakfast, this story appears twice in the gospels. Early in Luke's gospel, it is a call story, with a living Jesus calling the first of his disciples to follow him. At the end of John's gospel, it is a recognition story, with a risen Jesus appearing one last time to his disciples.

Both stories involve disciples fishing at night to no avail, with Jesus appearing on the shore at daybreak, and instructing them on which side of the boat to drop their nets. In each, an abundance of fish are caught, making their nets hard to pull in, so we can pretty much assume they were not smelt or sardines or even sunfish. John will add the detail there were 153 fish caught, a number that has both speculators and scholars for centuries as to its significance. The vast consensus is it simply was meant to convey a miraculous abundance. That said, if you add 1+2+3+4+5...all the way to 17, your total will be 153.

One final piece to watch before we read the first part of our lesson. Since seminary I have been intrigued by what seems to be an underlying tension in the Gospel of John, between Simon Peter and the one called simply, the “beloved disciple” or “the disciple Jesus loved.” At various points in the gospel, I find a priority given to the beloved disciple at the expense of Peter. When told of the empty tomb by Mary Magdalene, the two have an Easter morning footrace, after which we are told the beloved disciple believed, but nothing is written about Peter. This morning, it is the beloved disciple who first recognizes Jesus after the fish catch. Only at the end of the end of the book will the gospel writer indicate he is the beloved disciple; if so, John would be very old when he wrote this gospel.

The disciples are back home, on the Sea of Tiberias, also known as the Sea of Galilee. John 21:1-14:

*After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way.* <sup>2</sup>*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.* <sup>3</sup>*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.*

<sup>4</sup> Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. <sup>5</sup> Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." <sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> 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 sea. <sup>8</sup> 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.

<sup>9</sup> When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." <sup>11</sup> So 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. <sup>12</sup> 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. <sup>13</sup> Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. <sup>14</sup> This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

Breakfast is over, but it seems Jesus has some unfinished business. He has just eaten with a disciple who had denied him, not once, not twice, but three times. While in the other gospels, Peter wept bitterly upon recognizing what he had done, in John's Gospel, when the rooster crowed but there is no report of Peter's sorrow. Now, Jesus turns to Peter and asks him a question, not once, not twice, but three times.

We conclude our reading in John 21:15-19:

Reader 1: *When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?"*

Reader 2: *Peter said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."*

Reader 1: *Jesus said to him, "Feed my lambs." Then, a second time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"*

Reader 2: *Peter said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you."*

Reader 1: *Jesus said to him, "Tend my sheep." Then, he said to him the third time, "Simon son of John, do you love me?"*

Reader 2: *Peter felt hurt because Jesus 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."*

Reader 1: *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."*

There are sixteen Meyers Briggs personality types. If I had to guess, Jesus did not use Meyers Briggs when he called his disciples, but it seems he sought a variety to make up his discipleship corps, including among the seven fishing that night.

For the first and only time in the Gospel of John, we hear of the Sons of Zebedee, James and John. The two were known as the sons of thunder, so we imagine them to have loud, proud personalities, which in the other gospels cause them to ask for places of honor next to Jesus in heaven. I expect Jesus had to keep them on a leash.

We know something of Thomas, but not much about Nathanael, nor one of the two unnamed disciples. We might think of them as silently laboring, doing their job well, but not out front in a leadership role. Still, they probably have three different personality types.

Of the seven, two are active and speaking. I am guessing the disciple Jesus loved is the other unnamed one, who was the first to recognize it was Jesus on the shore. It was daybreak, dawn, when the dark of night was just being erased by the first light of the day. That is around the when the rooster crows. I don't think it is by accident it is to Peter he says, "It is the Lord," perhaps to make it clear he recognized Jesus before Peter.

Then, there is Peter. It may be the last time Peter fished naked. Upon hearing that it is Jesus on the shore, he throws on his clothes and impetuously jumps in the lake. The text implies he left it to the others to bring the boat to shore with the heavy load of fish. If he was not the first to recognize Jesus, he wanted to be the first to reach him.

One branch of the military indicates it seeks the few, the proud, the brave; by contrast, Jesus invites the many, the loud, the weak; he calls those with keen alertness and those who ponder; the deliberative who drive others crazy by how long they take to decide, and the impulsive who drive others crazy by how quickly they react without thinking. I think the commandant of the Marines may have it easy with a select group, compared to Jesus' decision to herd disciples of many personalities. Yet, both seek to form those called into a cohesive, effective group.

In a very real way, that is what a pastor nominating committee of a church is charged to do – find a person gifted to herd the many personalities of a particular congregation. Now, admittedly, some personality types are not as prone to be found occupying a pew on a Sunday morning, but I am going to guess almost all sixteen Meyers Briggs are here in this sanctuary this morning.

Some of you are like the three fishing that night about whom we know fairly little. You are here faithfully for worship each week, laboring silently, contributing as generously as you can, but without fanfare and not yearning to lead, likely because you have discerned that is not your gift. You prefer to hop in the boat, do the fishing, then go home and into the world to be a disciple in a different setting. While perhaps fairly silent, you like it when your thoughts are sought and heard.

And yes, most congregations have sons and daughters of thunder, the James and Johns, who do great things but their brashness may need a bit of a leash. To be honest, I am not sure I know who you are, and perhaps it is better that way because I am not a leash person.

In a congregation there are those like the beloved disciple who are quick to recognize the movement of the Spirit, those times when they sense Jesus has appeared with a message. At best, they let it be known with prayerful humility; at worst, they stick it in the face of the naked Simon Peter who shares space in the boat.

And in this boat we call a congregation, we have the Simon Peter's, who when they hear something, throw on their clothes and jump in the water without really weighing the effect of their actions. "Let's get going, let's just do it," they tell us. Forget the details, or even the fact there is a heavy net of fish we need to bring to shore.

That's just seven in the boat, but in Scripture, seven marks wholeness, completeness, and what I find in this scene is the inclusion it reveals, which is centered on Jesus' invitation to all of them, "Come and have breakfast."

While the image of feeding sheep on the bulletin cover suffices, I was really looking for, but could not find a good image of a charcoal fire, around which a group is gathered. I pondered downloading an image of the scene from the movie, "Blazing Saddles," but it is really only effective with sound.

This morning, we will hear Jesus has fired up the Weber grill and already has a fish roasting over coals. He will invite the disciples to a breakfast of broken bread and fish. We are to be reminded of the feeding of the 5000 with those same two foods. The Gospel of John does not have a last supper with bread and wine, so some consider bread and fish to be John's Eucharist, his Communion. In fact, "early Christian iconography tended to picture the Eucharist with images of fish and bread rather than with cup and bread." Wouldn't that be interesting to prepare and serve the first Sunday of each month? [Donelson, Lewis, in *Feasting on the Word, Year C, Volume 2*, (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), p. 423.]

"Come and have breakfast – all of you." The whole of Jesus' disciples, Jesus' church, with all their various personalities and hangups, came together to eat breakfast with him. Not only were they invited to breakfast, they were asked to add their catch to the grill. Jesus takes our catch, together, in one full net – not just my catch and not just your catch, but our catch. Note in the end, Peter took his turn to haul in the net.

We never know what will happen at a breakfast with Jesus, or who will show up. While might consider someone beyond help or rehabilitation, God, as seen in Jesus, is in the business of transformation. Jesus can take our denials and turn them into commitments to love. Jesus forgives and forgets sin, because to let us cling to it means our hands are not free to feed the lambs and tend the sheep.

"Come and have breakfast, and learn how to follow. Remember, you have had breakfast together, a breakfast I made for you, and not just for one of you, but all of you. So, as I tell Peter, so I tell you, go feed my sheep as you have been fed by me."

So, why the need for the final chapter, the epilogue? Perhaps to remind us the story of the risen Jesus really does not end. He will continue to appear, and be recognized, and invite disciples to breakfast. Those who will read John's words will find themselves around Jesus' campfire, disciples commissioned to feed lambs and tend sheep. Some who read it may run from it, because they realize in showing Jesus' love, in feeding Jesus' sheep, in doing Jesus' work, in showing Jesus' mercy, there is no guarantee of security. Jesus knows Peter will be crucified for his discipleship. The disciple Jesus loved will not. If I had to choose, I know which disciple path I would take. But then, it is not my choice.