

“Easter Breakfast”

A Sermon Preached by Rev. Young-Mee Park

First United Methodist Church of Oak Park

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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 sea. 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 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." (John 21:1-19)

How long ago was it that they had left their fishing nets at the seashore? Now and then, time flies, doesn't it? Since they met Jesus on the seashore some three years ago, together, with Jesus, they went through a lot, through thick and thin, good times and bad, as we often say.

But what an unexpected turn of events the last week! The cheers of Palm Sunday crowd still ringing in their ears, the taste of the Passover meal still lingering in their mouths,

Peter and his friends had to face the fateful night. Before their very eyes, Jesus was arrested, interrogated, judged, and then, crucified. Mingled with these unthinkable and unbearable events were their own stories of betrayal, denial, and desertion. Then, there was Easter -- the empty tomb and the appearance of the risen Lord! What a roller coaster! I bet their world had been turned upside down, not once, but many times!

And in our story today, we find them back home, by the Sea of Tiberius, or Sea of Galilee, the same place where they had met Jesus for the first time. We do not know how many days or how many weeks have passed since the first Easter and their encounter with the risen Lord, but I imagine that they were still confused, still struggling. They still did not know what to make of what had happened; they still did not have any idea about what would happen next. Maybe, that was it. Maybe, it was all supposed to end there, they were thinking.

So, here they are, back to the boat, back to fishing, back to the old and familiar life. However, that night, Peter and his friends could not succeed at the one thing they thought they could do. They caught nothing, says the Evangelist. How very frustrating! How very exhausting! Can you picture Peter and his friends flinging nets out over the black waters again and again and hauling them in dripping wet and as empty as their dreams?

But then, day breaks, and they hear a voice calling out to them from the beach: "*Did you catch anything?*" They shake their heads: "*Nothing.*" "*Cast the net to the right side of the boat!*" the voice suggests. "*What the heck. What have we got to lose?*" They try, even though without much hope, without much conviction. But what a surprise! The weight of the wiggling fish they have caught is such that they have difficulty hauling in the net! One of the disciples says with a gasp, "*It is the Lord!*"

Peter jumps into the water and swims ashore, while others come in by boat, pulling along the net full of fish. When they come ashore, they see a charcoal fire with fish cooking and bread ready. "*Come and have breakfast,*" says Jesus. They huddled around the fire, but none of the disciples dare to say anything, even the impulsive and talkative Peter.

After breakfast, Jesus looks Peter in the eye and asks, "*Simon, son of John, do you love me?*" And Peter answers, "*Yes, Lord. You know that I love you.*" Then Jesus asks again, "*Simon, son of John, do you love me?*" And Peter answers again, "*Yes, Lord. You know that I love you.*" For the third time, Jesus asks, "*Simon, son of John, do you love me?*" His anguish evident in his voice, and yet, with all the sincerity he can muster, Peter answers, "*Yes, Lord. You know that I love you.*"

A deeply touching story, evoking a deeply painful memory, isn't it? We remember, and Peter himself certainly remembers, that fateful Thursday night. "*No, I do not know him. No, I am not one of them. No, I do not know what you are talking about.*" Three times, Peter denied even knowing Jesus. Now, Peter has to look the man whom he denied in his eyes and find forgiveness, healing, and reconciliation.

We know that this is not the first time that Peter is in the presence of the risen Lord. We know that Jesus appeared to him at least twice after the Resurrection - on Easter evening when the disciples were hiding behind locked doors, and then again a week later, when Jesus invited Thomas to touch him and believe.

And yet, it was not enough. No. Not for Peter, not for his friends. The fact that they were back to fishing, back to life as usual implies that. Jesus' resurrection in and of itself, the appearance of the risen Lord in and of itself, did not automatically transform them for new life and ministry. Witnessing the empty tomb and the risen Lord, Mary shouted, "*I have seen*

the Lord!” Thomas exclaimed, “*My Lord, my God!*” Yet, Peter and his friends were not able to translate that Easter joy and that Easter faith into life and mission in the world.

So, they are back to fishing, back to old life, life as usual. After a miraculous catch, they recognize their Lord, but precisely because they recognize him, they dare not to ask! They dare not to say anything! An awkward situation, isn't it?

Last Wednesday, I had a meeting with a group of Seminary students. “*How was your Easter?*” I asked. “*Great! Amazing!*” They all answered. When each of them had a chance to share some of their wonderful Easter experiences, I continued: “*How have you been sustaining your Easter?*” I heard a gasp and then nothing. After the high slopes of Easter, they were now back to their sea-level routine with books to read, papers to write, and all the worries about their uncertain future.

But who are we to disapprove of them? Who are we to criticize Peter and his friends? I am not saying that we need to stay on an emotional or spiritual high forever. I know too well that it is neither possible nor healthy. My question is what difference our glorious Easter experience has made in our lives. Those of us who have seen the risen Lord and believed, what difference has it made in our lives?

I don't know about you, but I can easily relate to Peter and his friends, as well as to my Seminary students. Yes, I see myself in their stories. After amazing Easter experiences, I often go back to the Sea of Galilee by myself. And I do whatever I think I know how to do. All night long, I exhaust myself casting nets into the sea, but often my nets come out empty. And of course, I feel tired and defeated. As much as Peter did, I need my Lord to call me out from the shore. As much as Peter did, I need breakfast on the beach with my Lord.

Three times, Jesus asked, “*Do you love me?*” Three times, Peter answered, “*Yes, Lord, you know that I love you.*” And three times, Jesus followed Peter's response with a commission, “*Feed my lambs. Tend my sheep. Feed my sheep.*” Three times, Jesus not only restored him, but also reclaimed him. Three times, Jesus not only brought him back to where he was, but moved him beyond that. Three times, Jesus gave him something to do – a mission, an agenda.

If you are like me, if you have been out on the sea all night, alone, tired, and worn out, pulling in empty nets, you need a good breakfast. Come join the Easter meal on the beach. The risen Lord is waiting for you, with bread and a charcoal fire ready. Come have breakfast with Jesus. You will be fed. You will be nourished. You will be restored. And you will be given something to do. Yes, your lives will be given meaning, purpose, and direction.

No, my friends, the Easter story does not end with the empty tomb, but begins with it. No, my friends, we do not need to go back to the sea, to fruitless fishing. We do not need to go back to the old life of fear and despair, confusion and doubt, lie and deception. Come, my friends! Our Lord awaits us on the beach. Let us come and have breakfast together, with our Lord. Then, being fed, let us go out and feed others. We are Easter people! Thanks be to God!