

Sermon for Sunday, April 19, 2026

John 21:1-14

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

Last week our Scripture reading was John 20:19-31. That passage is a story that tells of an appearance of Jesus to the disciples including a specific conversation with Thomas during which Jesus demonstrated that he was truly alive. The last two verses of that reading sound like the author is finishing up his gospel. John 20:30-31 "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. 31 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."

Notice in 20:30 "Jesus did many other signs...which are not written in this book." In the early years of Christianity, most of the stories of Jesus were spoken: oral traditions passed on from one person to another. (Oral traditions, story telling continues to this day: just come to Tuesday morning coffee and listen to the guys sharing stories....) Eventually people/authors started to realize that writing the stories of Jesus down was a good idea. Clearly there were other stories being shared about Jesus in those early years. Which can lead us to believe that somewhere along the line, someone added the stories included in today's reading from chapter 21. That author (and it might have been the same person as the one who wrote the first 20 chapters) concluded that the story of Jesus wasn't complete without these final stories.

One of these stories is the one I call "Breakfast with Jesus. What are some of the things that needed to be included in the gospel and what might we learn from this story?

- We are told that after the resurrection appearances as related in the previous chapter, seven of the disciples, including Peter, Thomas, James & John didn't quite know what to do with themselves. It's not surprising then that at Peter's instigation several of them decided to return to the trade that they knew: fishing.
- For those of us who have had multiple careers or jobs over the years, we might recognize this desire to return to a former job/life situation. How many of us have looked back

at our former life or trade and wished to return?

Additionally, some of us actually do return...but speaking from personal experience, I found that returning to a former job wasn't nearly as satisfying as it once was. My life experience had moved me on. I had been trained for something new and returning isn't really an option. Peter, Thomas, James & John, Nathanael, and the others thought they wanted to return to their former lives, but after the resurrection that simply wasn't going to work. They had been trained to be witnesses of the risen Christ and a life as a fisherman wasn't an option. (As evidenced by the fact that they didn't catch any fish.)

- Which brings me to the enormous catch of fish: The mention of that enormous catch is told to demonstrate Jesus' power. This is a miracle story designed to reinforce Jesus' identity as God's son. But it is also a story of abundance. Commentator Karoline Lewis writes, "It is in Jesus' demonstration of abundance, a sign of grace upon grace, that the moment of recognizing Jesus happens....The resurrected Christ will be seen in displays of abundance. The ascended Christ will be known when his disciples establish opportunities to experience abundant grace."ⁱ Demonstrating God's abundant grace was the task of Jesus and now that task is being turned over to the disciples. The massive catch of fish provides them with two insights: first that the person on the beach is someone special: it's Jesus! And secondly that they are called to new work in God's kingdom.
- As the disciples hurry to the shoreline dragging the net full of fish they find a charcoal fire burning with fish already cooking and bread. The charcoal fire is an interesting detail: it's intended to remind us of the charcoal fire over which Peter stood when he denied being a disciple of Jesus. The presence of this fire is preparing us for the part of the story that we will hear next week: the reinstatement of Peter.
- This gospel's most important task was to provide multiple proofs or signs regarding Jesus' identity as the Son of God. John wants his readers to recognize Jesus through multiple signs of God's abundant grace. A brief recap from our reading of this entire gospel will help because people recognizing Jesus as God's son occurs in story after story in this gospel. Examples include:
 - The story of the conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus in chapter 3. Nicodemus wants to

recognize Jesus as God's Son (hence the conversation) but can't seem to set aside his religious education and beliefs. Nicodemus' name appears two more times in this gospel and we have reason to believe that his doubts were overcome.

- The Samaritan woman at the well in chapter 4 doesn't recognize Jesus at first either, but by the end of the conversation she is ready to make a claim. She runs into her village and invites others to come and listen to Jesus. What happens? Many others become believers. A sign of God's abundant grace.
- Then there is the story of the healing of the man born blind as told in chapter 9. Once again this man's profession of belief in Jesus as God's son occurs rather slowly, but by the end he clearly states, "Lord, I believe." A sign of God's abundant grace.

Returning to today's reading: As Jesus stands on the shore his most fervent disciples do not recognize him. Note that they have been working all night without success: they are probably tired. It is just after daybreak and the light may still be dim. After all, Mary Magdalene first saw Jesus very early in the morning—we don't know how bright it was—but she didn't recognize him at first either. So, early in the morning in dim light, the disciples don't recognize Jesus. He gives them fishing instructions—try the other side of the boat—try a different tactic—and their catch is enormous. A sign of God's abundant grace.

Recognition of Jesus begins with dawn: it is a new day. Recognition of Jesus is enhanced by something amazing: an unexpected appearance at an unexpected place with an unexpected result. But perhaps the most important method of recognizing Jesus comes when they eat breakfast with him. Breaking bread together confirmed, affirmed that they were in the presence of the risen Lord. Breakfast with Jesus is a sign of God's abundant grace.

In a few moments we will be sharing holy communion: we will be partaking of bread and wine as Jesus instructed us. Will we recognize Jesus in the breaking of the bread? I cannot say. But this I will say, When you receive the bread, the words spoken are, "This is the body of Christ given for you." There's a reason for that. Jesus is present in, with and under the bread. In the same way when you receive the wine the words spoken are, "This is the blood of Christ shed for you." Again I say, there's a reason for that. We believe that Jesus is present in, with, and under the wine. How is that possible? That's part of the mystery: and it cannot be explained. In faith we are called to simply trust that it is true. Sharing holy communion is a sign of God's abundant grace; part of the story that has been passed on to us for 2000 years..

When I was a preschool teacher I used to prepare a lesson called "Breakfast with Jesus" based on this story. Goldfish crackers were usually part of the snack. Preschoolers are delightful because their belief in Jesus develops pretty easily. Adults have lots more questions and are harder to convince. John, the gospel author knows that and has written this gospel in an attempt to convince "those who have not seen but have come to believe."

My friends, the good news for you today is that you are part of a blessed community of faithful people. You are people who have not seen the risen Lord but have come to believe. That faith, in and of itself, is a sign of God's abundant grace. May your faith in Jesus continue to grow in the days, weeks, and months ahead. Let it be so dear Lord, let it be so. Amen.

John 20:29 Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."

ⁱ Lewis, Karoline, *John*. Page 255