

“Breakfast by the Sea Shore”

John 21: 1-19

Today as we continue celebrating the Easter Season, we get sort of an odd text, odd because it appears to have been added as an afterthought to the Gospel of John. Jesus had already shown up to the disciples a couple of times. Jesus had already given them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had already commissioned them to go. So why does John feel the need to add this odd story? Most commentators agree that this part of John is not original to the Gospel and was added later but why?

I'm not sure that anyone has the real answer to that question and even though it may have been added later on as an epilogue, as an afterthought, this odd sort of text tells us of one of the most beloved scenes in the New Testament. It tells us of one of the last times that Jesus broke bread with his disciples. This text paints an intimate picture of Jesus sitting with his disciples, caring for them, feeding their souls, and offering them hope and grace, one last time. This text, even if it was added as an afterthought, provides us with a wonderful picture that continues to remind us, that Jesus is always there for us, feeding our souls and offering us hope and grace as his disciples here on Earth, especially when we don't know where to

turn, just like he did for his disciples all those years ago that morning along the seashore.

I invite you to turn in your bibles to John 21:

(Read the verses)

As I was reading this text again for what may be the umpteenth time, I was struck by many things. I had always assumed certain things about this text but after reading it again this time, I realized that many of my assumptions were not always true. For example, I always assumed that after Jesus gave his disciples the gift of the Holy Spirit, they all would go out and do what they were supposed to do, do what Jesus told them to do but that was not the case. In fact, instead of going out, a few of the disciples go fishing. Now please don't hear me say that fishing is bad. What I am saying is that instead of going out and doing what Jesus told them to do, instead the disciples go back to fishing, back to what they knew and did before Jesus. They go back to business as usual almost as if their experience with Jesus is just some blip on the radar, just some adventure with a wild and crazy guy that now he is gone, they can settle down and get back to a normal life. Come to think of it. Maybe that's why John added this story. Maybe he is trying to tell us as Jesus' disciples that once we've experienced the Risen Christ and once we've received the gift of the Holy Spirit, there is no such thing as going back to "Business as usual". There is no such thing as going back to a "normal

life". Maybe John is telling us that we as Jesus' disciples can't just say, "Jesus, thanks for stopping by. And thanks for the gift of the Holy Spirit. We'll put it somewhere safe, when we really know that we are going to put it in some closet and try to forget that Jesus gave it to us in the first place, that we are going to try to forget that Jesus commissioned us to go out and be the Body of Christ in our world. Maybe John is telling us that as Jesus' disciples, we can't just say, "Okay, Jesus, You take care of yourself now" as we push him out the door like he is some guest that doesn't know when to go home, as we push him out the door like he is some guest that has overstayed his welcome. Maybe John is telling us that this plan of ours doesn't really sit well with Jesus. Maybe John is trying to make us aware that Jesus is going to keep popping up and reminding us of his presence in spite of our plans, in spite of our attempts to forget our new mission, that Jesus is going to keep coming back time and time again to prevent us as his disciples here on earth from slipping back into business as usual as the church, into what we knew and did before we knew Jesus because in reality there is no such thing anymore. Maybe John is telling us that Life can't go back to business as usual after our experience with Jesus because it doesn't exist anymore. It's been changed. We've been changed. We are not the same people that we were before, before we knew Jesus, before we experienced God's grace, before we experienced God's love. Our experience with the Risen Christ has changed our way of thinking, our way of

doing, our very way of being, and we can't go back to who we were before Jesus came into our lives because that person doesn't exist anymore. And now that we have been changed, we need to realize that there is no going back. And in moving forward, We have been called to be Jesus' disciples in all that we do, in all that we say, and in all of our relationships with God's children here on earth. We are called to be Jesus' disciples each and every day, no matter how much we wish we could go back to business as usual.

Why, just this past week, a former camp kid who is now in seminary shared that she had gone out to dinner with her family and she couldn't help but resent her seminary education, resent her connection with Christ because she was no longer able to just sit down and enjoy her meal. All she could think about was Did her server make a living wage? Was the food raised humanely? How many miles did her food travel to be on her plate? And these were just a few of the things that ran through her mind. She shared that throughout the whole dinner experience, she just couldn't turn off Christ and enjoy her meal. She realized that a dinner out with her family was no longer just a dinner out with her family. She had become so aware of the many injustices that fill her world that she wasn't able to just close her eyes and enjoy her meal anymore. She had been changed by her relationship with the Risen Christ and she couldn't go back to who she was or what she knew before she knew Christ.

Maybe that's why John added this text. He wants us to know that there is no going back to business as usual once we've experienced the Risen Christ. Everything, including us, has been changed because of that experience. We can't go back to who we were or what we knew before Jesus came into our lives, no matter how many times we may try. We just can't turn off Christ and enjoy our meal. We can't become oblivious anymore to the many ways that we are called to be the Body of Christ in our world, no matter how much we may want to, no matter how many times we may think life would be simpler if we could just ignore Christ's voice in our hearts and our hearts. We cannot go back to the life we knew before we experienced the Risen Christ because we are no longer the same person we were before Christ came into our lives.

Well, that's just one thing that caught my attention when I was reading this text. Another thing that caught my attention was that after a night of fishing and catching nothing, Jesus comes along and tells the disciples to throw their nets off the right side of the boat. What exactly is Jesus talking about here? Is he just saying that the disciples have been pulling their nets from the left side of the boat and now he wants them to try the right side? Or is there something more to this statement?

Honestly, I hope that the changing sides of the boat is all that Jesus is talking about here but I couldn't help wondering if there is something more? Wondering

If maybe Jesus is really telling the disciples that they have been doing it all wrong up to that point, and if they would just try the right side, meaning the correct way, then the results would be amazing.

I have to tell you that my immediate fear in reading the text this way is that many people and many churches will hear Jesus say that there is a right way to be a Christian, a right way to be the church, that there is a right formula, a right program that will fix all their problems and will save their churches. Many will hear that if we just do A, B, and C, than we will get huge results. They will also hear that if we are not getting those type of results, then we must be doing something wrong, that we must be failures, that we should just give up and close the doors. My fear and the danger of reading the text this way is that many churches will hear this negative message and give up being the Body of Christ here on earth. They may just start thinking-Why bother and begin holding a Sunday morning worship service that doesn't challenge them or inspire them in their faith, begin having a Sunday morning worship service that consists only of a few songs and sermon with three points and a poem, none of which will ignite a passion for God's Kingdom. My fear and the danger of reading this text in such a way is that many people, many churches will hear that they are not doing enough to bring about the Kingdom of God here on earth, that they are not being the Body of Christ here on earth the right way and they will fall into a pattern that ignores the Risen

Christ in their midst. They will ignore their call to share the good news. They will fall into a pattern that will allow the church to feel good about themselves while allowing them to forget about all of God's children who are hurting and in need of God's grace and God's love.

And as I lived with this text this week, I realized that is just another way the church goes back to business as usual. We hear a message that we don't like and we begin to ignore the Risen Christ in our midst. Maybe that's another reason why John added this text, to remind us that even the disciples didn't get it right the first time they were supposed to go out as Jesus' disciples. They didn't get it right the second time they were supposed to go and spread the good news. They didn't even get it right the umpteenth time they went out as Jesus disciples.

Maybe that's another reason why John adds this text, to remind us that there may be lots of ways we can pretend to ignore Jesus as his disciples. We can either ignore him because we think life will be simpler without him or we can ignore him because we don't like his message. Either way, they are our attempts as the church, as Jesus' disciples to try to go back to business as usual, going back to who we were before Jesus, before the Risen Christ changed our lives, changed our way of thinking.

Sure, I'll admit, that like my former camp kid, sometimes I do wish I could just turn off Christ's voice in my heart and in my head. Sometimes I wish I could

just ignore the injustices around me and enjoy a meal but I'm not sure that I really like the options that this action or should I say this inaction leaves me with as Jesus' disciple here on earth. I'm not sure that I would like just slipping into a routine, slipping into a faith that doesn't convict me, that doesn't inspire me, that doesn't challenge me to become the person God created me to be, that doesn't open my eyes to the many ways that God is calling me to feed God's sheep. I'm also not sure that I like thinking that I can just ignore the Risen Christ in my midst either. What if I did want to turn off his voice in my heart and in my head? What if I don't like him telling me that I could do more as his disciple, that I could do more to heal the hurts of the world, that I could do more to become the person that God created me to be? To be honest, I'm not sure that I would like to imagine what my life would look like without the Risen Christ being a part of it.

So where does that leave me? Where does that leave us as Jesus' disciples? Where does that leave us as the Body of Christ here on earth? If these are our two options, all of which amount to ignoring the Risen Christ in our midst, then I'm not sure I like either of them.

Well, another thing, I noticed about this text is that Jesus offers the disciples another way. After the disciples recognized Jesus, they joined him for a meal. Maybe it is the Disciple in me, but I can't help but think that Jesus is saying this is the way to be his disciple in the world. Jesus is offering them another way of being

his disciple that doesn't ignore the Risen Christ in our midst, that doesn't turn off Christ voice in our hearts and our heads, that doesn't allow us to go back to business as usual. And he does this by inviting them to a meal, a meal where he provides the fish, where he provided the drink, where he provides the grace.

Maybe the real reason John adds this story is because he wants us to understand that being Jesus' disciple is not an either or option. It is a both/and way of being. He wants us to understand that there is another way of being Jesus' disciple, another way that doesn't beat us up because we may fall short, another way that doesn't set the bar so high that we give up on trying to be the Body of Christ here on earth, another way that doesn't require perfection, but only requires that we gather as children of God, beloved, named and claimed as one of God's very own.

Maybe John is telling us that we can be Jesus' disciples, not as either/or but as both/and. And we can do this every time we break bread with one another. We can do this when we really get to know each other, not as the world knows us, but as how God knows us. Maybe John is telling us that there is another way to be Jesus' disciple, a way that offers us grace, that offers us encouragement, that offers us strength, that offers us hope: just by being at the table with one another.

Because when we gather at the table, we are welcomed by God, we are embraced by God. When we gather at the table, we become vulnerable and the

walls that divide come tumbling down. Because when we gather at the table, we get to know each other as God knows us. And we can talk about our lives. We can talk about our hurts. We can talk about our fears. We can talk about our failures. We can talk about our joys. All because at the table, we truly become brothers and sisters in Christ. All because the Risen Christ has gathered us in, has welcomed us, has embraced us as God's own.

Maybe Jesus is telling us that we are not to ignore Christ voice in our heart and in head and only enjoy the meal at our own table. Maybe Jesus is telling us that we are to be his disciples by doing both/and; that we are called to hear Christ voice in our hearts and our heads, that we are called to enjoy our meal at the table, and that we are called to invite all of God's children to enjoy the meal at God's table as well. Being Jesus' disciple is not either/ or. It is both/and.

Maybe the real reason John added this story is to remind is that we cannot go back to business as usual. We cannot do be Jesus' disciples by disregarding Christ message of love and grace. We cannot do be Jesus' disciples by giving up being the Body of Christ here on earth.

Jesus tells us there is another way, a way that invites us to enjoy the meal at the table and challenges us to invite others to experience the grace of God as well. Today and all days, We have been given a commission. We have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit. And now is not the time to go back to business as usual. The

world needs us to be Jesus' disciples here on earth. The world needs us to find our passion for the Kingdom of God. The world needs us to invite all of God's children to the table so that everyone can enjoy the meal.

May we never forget who we are now that we have experienced the Risen Christ. And in doing so, may we never forget whose we are as his disciples here on earth. Amen.