

“It is the Lord!”

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. At this point in our story line, Jesus has already shown up to the disciples a couple of times. Jesus has already given them the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus has already commissioned them to go out into the world and spread the good news of God’s abundant life. So why does John feel the need to add this odd story? It seems that since all the really important stuff has already happened. John should have been able to skip to the end which is: “If I put down all the things that Jesus did, I suppose the world could not contain enough books to include them all”. I mean, come on that’s a great ending! So why this story? Why did John feel the need to include this odd sort of text before sharing this really great ending to his story?

Well, most commentators agree that this particular text that contains our story today is not original to the Gospel of John. They all agree that it was added later. However, what they can’t agree on is the why behind this text.

Some say this is a call story. It was added as a way to re-commission the disciples. After all, when we read this particular story, we are reminded of the

disciples' first encounter with Jesus. If we remember, in that story, the disciples were fishing again, very much like they are doing now. In that instance too, we are told that the disciples had fished all night and had caught nothing. Then Jesus tells them to try something a little different like going out to deeper water. And again, the disciples look at Jesus like he was crazy but they do what he says, realizing what do they have to lose anyway?

If we remember in that story, when the disciples did what Jesus told them to do, miraculously, they had an overwhelming catch, one in which they struggled to bring into the boat. In that moment, just as in our story today, when the disciples were faced with the massive amount of fish, they recognized Jesus as Lord. Seems like a good reason to add this odd sort of text but...

Some commentators say, "Well, yes but this story could have been added because Peter needed to be redeemed. After all, we know that Peter denied Jesus three times at one of the most crucial moments of his discipleship. If Peter is going to be this great apostle that everyone is supposed to follow, then he really needs a good PR campaign. So some commentators say that this story was added to save face for Peter. That's why Jesus asks Peter three times-Do you love me? As a way to wipe out Peter's three time denial of Jesus before the crucifixion. Once again, seems like a good reason to add this odd sort of text but

Some commentators say, “Well yes but this story could have been added because it serves as one last reminder about God’s abundance of grace in our lives. We should recognize this because of the amount of fish the disciples catch, and the amount of times Jesus asks Peter “Do you love me?” As readers of this odd sort of text, we should recognize that this story is about God’s abundance of grace because everything about this story is over the top-Did you catch that Peter jumps into the water fully clothed? Seems kind of opposite of what’s logical. You know, kind of like how God’s grace defies our logic and surprises us in new and life-giving ways. Some commentators say that this text is a hyperbole of God’s grace, reminding the people of God how God’s graces comes to us in ridiculous amazing life changing ways. Once again, seems like a good reason to add this odd sort of text.

In fact, after living with this text this past week, they all seem like good reasons for John to have added this text because they open us up to see beyond just what we expected to see. Here’s why I say this: for me, as a disciple, I do not miss that everything about this story seems to be leading up to just one moment- the moment when the disciples gather at the Table with the Risen Savior. It seems that the “real” action of this story happens around a meal. Peter is forgiven and re-commissioned. The disciples experience God’s grace. All are invited to come as they are and experience the welcoming Spirit of God. And it all happens while they

are gathered around the fire eating with Jesus once more. Sure it is a simple meal, just a couple of fish thrown on the fire but still it is an opportunity for all the disciples, the ones who are lost and don't know where to turn, the ones who are in need of forgiveness, the ones who need to know that they are loved more than they could imagine, this simple meal of fish, cooked around a campfire, becomes an opportunity for them all to come and experience the presence of God in life-transforming ways.

In that moment, when the disciples eat together as a community connected with the Risen Christ, they remember everything Jesus taught them, said to them, shared with them. At the table, simple as it may be, in the presence of the One who loves them, their faith is encouraged. Their hope is renewed. Their hearts open to the Kingdom of God in their midst.

In an ordinary everyday act like eating a meal together, the disciples experience the presence of God and by doing so, are reaffirmed in their calling as followers of Jesus Christ. They are reminded of God's over the top, life-changing grace in their lives. In an ordinary everyday act like eating a meal together, the disciples are restored and renewed as Beloved Children of God.

You see for me, that's why we gather each week at the Table. We are People of the Table. We don't get this name simple because we hold a lot of potlucks or

the fact that we seem to be eating every time we turn around. We are People of the Table because each week, we gather at the Table, God's Table, because it is a moment in which we are invited into the presence of our Risen Savior. We are welcomed and embraced as who we are, broken imperfect people. At the Table, we are reminded that we are loved more than we could ever imagine. In that moment, as we gather at God's Table, we are re-centered in the presence of God and we become the people God created us and calls us to be. We are People of the Table because it is through the simple meal of the bread of new life and the cup of the new covenant that we find belonging and purpose as the people of God.

Or let me say it another way:

Just this past week, I was talking with a colleague and she shared with me that she had gone out to dinner with her family at a new restaurant in our hometown. As she shared with me that as she gathered around the table in that local restaurant, enjoying time with her family, she couldn't help but resent her connection with Christ. I know odd right? Usually this connection with Christ is something that we strive for, look for, try to cultivate in our lives. But at that table, as she engaged in the community gathered around that table, she could help but resent her connection with Christ. Now she fully admits she was shocked by this revelation. Because after all, her connection with Christ has helped her grown in her faith. It has helped her begin the process of transforming her into the person

God created her to be. But she realized that in that moment, gathered at the Table, sharing a meal with her family, 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?

These were just a few of the things that ran through her mind. She shared with me that throughout the whole dinner experience, as much as she enjoyed reconnecting with her family, telling stories, and hearing about what all everyone was doing nowadays, 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 realized that this simple meal connected her with the larger vision of the Kingdom of God. No longer was it just about her and her family. This meal represented a way for her to engage her faith and to bring healing and wholeness to all of God's creation.

At the table in a local restaurant, in her hometown, she had become so aware of the many injustices that fill our world that she just wasn't able to just close her eyes and enjoy her meal anymore. She had been changed by her relationship with the Risen Christ. She couldn't go back to who she was or what she knew before she knew Christ.

The same things holds true for us as followers of Jesus Christ. Every time we gather at the Table, sure we enjoy our time with one another. We celebrate our connection with each other. We give thanks for the healing and wholeness that we have found in the breaking of the bread and the drinking from the cup of the new covenant. Each and every week, as we gather at the Lord's Table, we are renewed. We experience an invitation into the welcoming presence of God, and we are reminded that we are loved more than we could ever imagine. In that moment, gathered around God's Table, we find our place in the Body of Christ. That's belonging.

But our experience with the Risen Christ doesn't allow us to stay there. It encourages us through the act of breaking bread with one another, to find our purpose as well. We realize that it is not enough to know we have enough bread and enough drink to satisfy our hungers and our thirsts. We begin to understand that we are called to also satisfy the hungers and thirsts of all of God's children as well. This moment eating, of breaking the bread of life, of drinking from the cup of the new covenant is meant for just our family and our friends. It is not just meant for those who think like us or act like us. It is meant to be shared with all of God's children.

This act of gathering around the Table is an act of justice. It is act of hope. It is an act where we as followers of Jesus Christ are re-commissioned to go out into

the world and feed God's sheep. It is an act in which we find our purpose. All because through the bread and the cup, we have been transformed and renewed by God's love and God's grace.

Because, you see, what my friend learned around that local restaurant's table, what the disciples learned around the campfire that morning, what we learned as followers of Jesus Christ every time we come to God's Table is that a meal together, any meal together with Jesus will always lead to feeding others. We learn that loving Jesus as his disciples will always lead to caring for God's children. For those who encounter Christ in our lives each and every day, in extraordinary and ordinary ways, through the simple act of breaking bread together, sure, we discover grace upon grace. But we also discover that it was never meant only for us. It was meant and is meant to be shared with all of God's creation.

When the invitation is extended to come and encounter the Risen Christ, whether it be at the communion table of our churches or at the local soup kitchen's table, as people of faith, in the act of breaking bread and drinking from the cup of the new covenant, it is there that we find both belonging and purpose. As followers of Jesus Christ, the very one who forgave Peter, who showed grace to the disciples, who recommissioned them to go out into the world to show God's abundant life with all, just like the disciples that morning, gathered around the campfire, eating



fish with the Risen Christ, every time we gather at the Table, we rediscover God's love and God's grace for ourselves and for the world. Through the bread and the cup, we are renewed and recommissioned to reach out to the world while sharing the healing and wholeness that we found with others. We are called to share this belonging and purpose with others.

You see, As always, it is never either/or when it comes to our God. It is always both/and. As people of faith, we are broken and made whole through the love and grace of God. As people of God, we live in the knowledge that God's Kingdom is in our midst and we hope for it to come to fruition fully here on earth. In the breaking of the bread, in the drinking from the cup of the new covenant, we gather at God's Welcome Table to become people of belonging and purpose.

Two things this world so desperately needs right now. I don't need to tell you what is happening in our world right now. We all know it. We've experienced it. There is a deep sense of loss when it comes to connection and community. It seems more and more, people have loads of Facebook friends but only have one or 2 people in their everyday lives who they would actually include as "real friends".

Maybe that's why John really added this odd sort of text. Sure he didn't know about the technology of our day. But he knew something else. He knew that the work we are called to do as followers of Jesus Christ matters. He knew a vision

where all are embraced and welcomed as children of God. He knew how the community of disciples could continue to experience the presence of God in our lives just by eating together

Maybe that's why John added this odd sort of text to show us how to cultivate a sense of belonging and purpose, not only for ourselves but for all of God's children. He knew that just like the first disciples we are the ones who can testify to these things. He knew the world would never believe us until it experienced it for itself. John knew that all it would take to change the world was an invitation, an invitation for all to come and experience the love and grace of God from us, the ones who have broken bread with the Risen Savior, from the ones who had found our belonging and our purpose.

May it be so. Amen.