

Who Are You?

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 include this story?

Some say this is a call story, that 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, very much like they are doing now. In that instance, 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. The disciples look at Jesus like he

was crazy but they do what he says, realizing that they have nothing to lose at this point.

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, the disciples recognized Jesus as Lord. Seems like a good reason to add this odd sort of text but the problem with that line of thinking is that in the Gospel of John, the calling of the disciples has nothing to do with fishing. That happens in the other Gospels, not in the Gospel of John.

In the Gospel of John, Jesus's first disciples were, well disciples of John the Baptist. John the Baptist sees Jesus, calls him the Lamb of God. Then two of John's disciples leave him and go to Jesus. When they start following him, Jesus simply says to them, "Come and See. Nothing is mentioned about fishing. So our story today being about how the disciples go back to what they already knew is great and has a great post-Easter message but it is not really true.

Which brings us back to the why the need for this particular text. Some commentators say, "Well, 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 whom

everyone is supposed to follow, then he really needs a good PR campaign. That's why Jesus asks Peter three times-Do you love me? As a way to offer Peter forgiveness and 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 in our story today, in Jesus' conversation with Peter, forgiveness is never mentioned. And the other thing to know is that in the Gospel of John, Peter doesn't deny knowing Jesus. Again, that's the other Gospels. In the Gospel of John, Peter denies being Jesus' disciples. When the people ask Peter about being one of Jesus's disciples, every time he responds by saying "I am not." In the Gospel of John, Peter denies being a disciples. He never denies knowing Jesus.

So again our story today being about forgiveness and redeeming Peter is great and has a wonderful Post –Easter message, but it is not really true.

Which brings us back to our original question...why the need for this story?

Well, after living with this text this past week, trying to come up with an answer to this question, the only thing that I could come up with is this...We need this text, this extra ending, because it invites us to see things in a new way. And 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. 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 grace, 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, everything he said to them, everything he 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. And that is why we need this story....

To remind us that it is in the ordinary everyday acts like eating a meal together, in which we experience the presence of God. It is in an ordinary everyday act like eating a meal together, in which we are restored and renewed as Beloved Children of God. The Truth of it is that it is in the ordinary everyday acts, like eating together, which makes the Kingdom of God a reality here on Earth as it is in Heaven.

You see for me, that's why we gather each week at the Table. We are People of the Table. As Big D Disciples, we didn't get this name simply 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 and we recognize that it is God's Table, not our Table. It is the 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. 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 which we become the people God created and calls us to be.

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. She shared with me that as she gathered around the table in the 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 ate a meal with those gathered, she could not 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 being becoming the person God created her to be. However, she realized in that moment, while she was gathered at the Table, sharing a meal with her family, she was no longer able to just sit down and enjoy her meal. In that moment, while she was gathered around the Table, all she could think about was Did her server make a living wage? Was the food raised humanely? How many miles had her food travel to be on her plate?

These were just a few of the things which 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, a way for her to engage in the work of bringing healing and wholeness to all of God's creation. This meal became a way for her to make the Kingdom of God a reality here on Earth as it is in heaven for all of God's people.

At the table in a restaurant, her eyes were open to the many injustices which fill our world, so much so that she was no longer able to simply enjoy her meal anymore. At the Table, she realized that she had been changed by her relationship

with the Risen Christ. She could never go back to who she was or what she knew before she knew Christ. In that moment, she realized the power and the promise of the Table.

And the same thing holds true for us as followers of Jesus Christ. Every time we gather at the Table, 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. We experience an invitation into the welcoming presence of God, and we are reminded that we are loved more than we could ever imagine.

But our experience with the Risen Christ doesn't allow us to stay there. We realize that it is not enough to know we have enough bread and enough drink to satisfy our hungers and our thirsts. At the Table, we begin to understand that we are called to also satisfy the hungers and thirsts of all of God's children as well. Through this moment of eating, of breaking the bread of life, of drinking from the cup of the new covenant, we realize that God's grace, that God's love was never meant for just our family and our friends. It was never meant just for those who think like us or act like us. It was meant to be shared with all of God's children. It was always meant to become the way we work together to make the Kingdom of God a reality here on Earth for all of God's people.

Because, what my friend learned around that restaurant's table, what the disciples learned around the campfire that morning, what we learn as followers of Jesus Christ is that any time we gather around God's Table, whether it is here in our sanctuary or the ordinary tables which fill our lives, anytime we gather around the Table, Jesus is always there, calling us to feed others. As Big D disciples and little d disciples, we know that loving Jesus always leads us to care for God's children.

Because on the night when Jesus was betrayed, he took a loaf of bread, blessed it and broke it and said, Remember me. In like manner, he took a cup and said this is the cup of the new covenant poured out for each and every one, and when you drink it Remember me. For as often as we eat this bread, and drink this cup, we remember...we remember everything Jesus taught us. We remember everything Jesus said to us. We remember that our prayer is on Earth as it is in heaven. Through the bread and the cup, as we gather around the Table, we remember.

Maybe that's why John really added this odd sort of text. Because he knew that all that was needed to make the Kingdom of God a reality here on here was for us to remember the story of how God's love can and does transform the world. May it be so. Amen.