

Breakfast

from the pulpit of
Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church
Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania
by
the Reverend Rachel Pedersen

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John 21:1-19

¹After these things Jesus showed himself again to the disciples by the Sea of Tiberias; and he showed himself in this way. ²Gathered there together were Simon Peter, Thomas called the Twin, Nathanael of Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two others of his disciples. ³Simon 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.

⁴Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was Jesus. ⁵Jesus said to them, "Children, you have no fish, have you?" They answered him, "No." ⁶He 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. ⁷That 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. ⁸But 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.

⁹When they had gone ashore, they saw a charcoal fire there, with fish on it, and bread. ¹⁰Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the fish that you have just caught." ¹¹So 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. ¹²Jesus 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. ¹³Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. ¹⁴This was now the third time that Jesus appeared to the disciples after he was raised from the dead.

¹⁵When 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." ¹⁶A 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." ¹⁷He 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." ¹⁸Very 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." ¹⁹(He said this to indicate the kind of death by which he would glorify God.) After this he said to him, "Follow me."

Second Reading Revelation 5:11-14

¹¹Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, ¹²singing with full voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!" ¹³Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, "To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!" ¹⁴And the four living creatures said, "Amen!" And the elders fell down and worshiped.

O living Word, abide within us, teach us, be the word that we hear and the word that we meditate upon, be the word that lives within us, be the word that takes root. Holy Spirit come and burn everything else away so that all that remains is the truth that you have given. Help us Lord to understand. Amen.

Pop Quiz—put your thinking caps on.... How many of you can remember how John’s Gospel begins? Way back... we usually read it on Christmas Eve. “In the Beginning was the word” ... word, and light, and life. John’s gospel begins in the cosmos, at the beginning of time. It is a big story and John sets it up as such. But it ends here: on a lakeshore in Galilee. To be honest, it would make more sense if John had borrowed a little from Revelation and ended more appropriately with Jesus rising in power and glory, with creation bowing down to the lamb who was slain. That would be a cosmic ending to the story. But, instead, it ends here: In the grey light of dawn, after an all-nighter, on the lakeshore, with the a little over half the disciples, and a few charbroiled fish.

Do you remember the first time you stayed up all night?

Do you remember the last time you stayed up all night?

Do you remember the nights you stayed up with friends filled with joy and anticipation hoping the night would never end? The nights that held questions so big so important that sleep couldn’t interrupt your thinking? The nights when work was so pressing that you needed to stretch the day beyond its limited twenty-four hours? What about the nights you held vigil—waiting for news, or a fever to break, or a car to finally arrive, or a last breath to be taken?

Nighttime is a sacred time. Somehow staying awake all night leads to something beyond bleary eyed confusion. God, after all, raised Jesus in the hours before dawn. We mortal humans also accomplish strange and incredible tasks after midnight and before the dawn breaks. Just ask some of our neighbors at Harcum or Eastern or at Bryn Mawr Collegethose who are handing in final papers over the next few weeks. I’m sure there have been a few late night miracles accomplished. We’ve all been there late at night as the hours tick by wrestling and wondering, waiting to see what the next day will bring.

In her short story: “The Death of Superman”¹ Sarah Weeks describes an older brother whose night begins by making a deal with his mother—that for \$100 he

¹ Sarah Weeks “The Death of Superman” in *Up All Night: A Short Story Collection*, New York: HarperCollins 178-209.

would watch his little brother over night while she was on a trip. In the end, he spends the entire night awake watching his little brother's dying pet mouse Superman. What begins as a selfish attempt to avoid telling his mother what was happening, ends with the narrator doing everything he can to protect his little brother from the inevitable. There's a dogged determination, when three a.m. comes and goes and the narrator remembers that the other times he had tried to stay up all night, when he had given up feeling sick, and too tired. But on this night, he's wide awake in a strange vigil with Superman the mouse; waiting for dawn and what that day would bring.

The disciples have survived an emotional, spiritual and physical roller-coaster over the past few weeks. These newly minted apostles are there on the shores of lake because they went back to a place they knew, to a life they understood, to a rhythm they had already mastered. After Jesus death and resurrection, they returned to the familiar. They go back to what they understand and to the familiar pattern of fishing at night.

Well, it was supposed to be a night of fishing, but there weren't too many fish involved. If this was a test run to see if they could just go back to their old lives in Galilee, the test wasn't going so well.

I wonder if the reason they didn't catch any fish that night had less to do with their skills, and more to do with all the distractions. Sitting there in the boat together, what did they talk about? Were they remembering other moments on this same lake: when the storm was raging, or when he walked across the waves? I wonder if they distracted by the past few weeks or the worries about the weeks to come? Whatever took them out onto the lake that night, whatever it was they were searching for, they come back empty handed.

From the lakeshore, Jesus—not a fisherman, but a carpenter turned messiah—shouts out advice: “Try the other side.” Without recognizing him, they throw out their nets.

Of course it's John—the beloved—who recognizes Jesus, who leans over to Peter and says “it's him.”

Of course it's Peter who jumps out of the boat, and failing to walk on water, swims to shore. The disciples following behind him with the boat and the catch.

Of course it is Jesus who meets them.

For all the Gospel of John's great love of dialogues and discourses, poetry and prose, there's not a lot of talking in the last chapter of John. No fiery speeches, just a glowing fire. No "Go into the world and make disciples" pep talks, just bread and fish.

The disciples spent the night searching and then are the ones who are found.

John's gospel gets caught up in words all the time, and yet, isn't it interesting that John is the one who makes sure we know that the Passion narrative begins with Jesus silent, kneeling and washing his disciples' feet. Before he says anything he is tending those lambs. He cares for them. Isn't it interesting, that here at the end, before saying anything, he meets them, welcomes them, makes a place around the fire for them and he feeds them. Moments so ordinary, you wonder why they made the cut to Gospel status. Moments when Jesus kneels to serve and tend to his people. Jesus brings his disciples together again, and cares for them again. Each of them, the Denier, the Doubter, the Beloved, Jesus hands all of them bread and fish, makes a place for each one of them around the fire.

Hold on to that image for just a second: the lamb who was slain, who all creatures in heaven and on earth and under the earth bow down to, that One... the One who is over all things and who gives life to all things, the Word Made Flesh, is on a lakeshore in Galilee handing bread to his disciples.

After everything Jesus has said, at the end of the Gospel, the Word Made Flesh, embodies the all the sayings, all the teachings, all the commandments, as he takes the position of servant again as he finds and tends his sheep.

The disciples know that something new is coming, that the lives they had known following after Jesus, those lives were going to change; but at this liminal moment, they don't know what that new life will look like, where the Spirit is going to take them. They don't know what they are going to do, or preach or teach. What will be demanded of them. They just know that at the end of a long night and empty nets, Jesus brings them together again.

It's the third time, they have experienced the Risen Christ, and there are no trumpets sounding, no angelic host surrounding, just friends sitting together.

In Jesus' last action of the Gospel of John, Jesus does what Jesus has always done building the kingdom by pulling together a bunch of failed fishermen. Pulling them together to create something new. He even finds time to meet face to face with the one who denied him. To spend time with him, to prepare *him* for what is to come, for what will happen next.

Jean Vanier, the founder of the L'Arche communities, could have had a 10,000 different careers. A naval officer at 20, he completed a PhD in philosophy, he has spent his life forming communities around the world that place individuals with cognitive and physical disabilities living in intentional community with typically developed adults.

Jean Vanier explains “the deepest desire for us all is to be appreciated, to be loved, to be seen as somebody of value. But not just seen...When you admire people, you put them on pedestals. *When you love people, you want to be together.* ... the first meeting I had with people with disabilities, what touched me was their cry for relationship.... All of them had lived pain and the pain of rejection. One of the words of Jesus to Peter— “Do you love me?”...Thus, the cry of God saying, “Do you love me?” and the cry of people who have been wounded, put aside, who have lost trust in themselves ... and all the rest. Their cry is, “Do you love me?” It's these two cries that come together as one.”²

Jesus sits together with his disciples because he loves them. He doesn't have to say the words out loud because he's lived them. He's embodied the love he has for them. He loved them so much that he died for them. He loved them so much that he is up all night just yards away, gathering the wood, tending the flame, cleaning the fish, preparing the dough, he does all of that so that they could be together, because they love each other.

The kingdom of God is not something that is far off. It is close and it is at hand. It is not the miracles of water turning into wine or 5000 being fed, it is in friends, damp and exhausted, gathered around a fire. It is when we are together, in the ordinary and every day, that we see God's love again and again. When you love people you want to be together.

² From the interview of Vanier Jean by Krista Tippett *On Being: The Wisdom of Tenderness* (Dec. 20 2007) accessed online: <https://onbeing.org/programs/jean-vanier-the-wisdom-of-tenderness/>

At the end of Sarah Week's story, the older brother is not alone. Just before dawn, his little brother wakes up to learn that his mouse has died. Now they are together, holding the body of a tiny mouse. The older brother isn't certain of what one does, but together they make a plan. The two brothers make their way to bury the pet. They walk to the park,

Sarah Weeks describes the scene:

"The sun was barely up as my little brother and I carry superman down to Riverside park to bury him. We dig a hole under a bush with my mother's wok spatula and lay the tiny bundle in it. "He was a good mouse" Joe said solemnly. I never even liked superman, but I am overcome with sadness. Joe thinks we should sing something, but the only thing we both know is "itsy bitsy spider." We sing it together. My voice cracks a couple of times and I almost lose it again. I take Joe's hand and we walk back up West End Avenue to our apartment."

Together. That's what it's about... together.

Whatever it is that keeps you up all night—

A typhoon arriving

A baby who can't sleep

A dream so real

A question so big

A hurt so deep.

That at the end of the night you walk out bleary-eyed and uncertain of what the day ahead will bring. Here is the good news of the Gospel: we are in this together.

Christ is the one who has called us together, who has prepared the meal that we will share together. Christ is the one that has made it possible for the love of God to be made known.

Do you remember where the Gospel of John begins, way out in the cosmos? This is where it ends. John's Gospel is a love letter to the disciples who formed the first churches. It is a love letter describing what happens when the people of God

come together in the love of Christ. It doesn't end in chapter 21, it begins again, not on a cosmic level, but on personal one.

The Good Shepherd has already provided everything, now it is our job to face the day together.