

“Breakfast on the Beach”

Introduction: Just a few years ago I came across an article in *The Washington Post* about humanist gatherings, congregations that don’t believe in God led by pastors who don’t believe in God. So why do they gather? They gather because they have a need to live with a purpose. In particular, they sense a need to do justice, to experience community, and to feel hope. These are three wonderful yearnings of the human spirit. But I wonder what Jesus might say about pursuing them without him?

In this vein, in this season of resurrection—Eastertide—as it is sometimes called, we’ve been looking at the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus and how he came alongside and tenderly cared for those who were experiencing grief, hopelessness, fear, anxiety, and doubt. In this morning’s text, we’ll see Jesus come to and feed those who were feeling rather purposeless. We’ll hear Jesus call them to join him in feeding others, thereby filling their lives with great purpose. It is a purpose to which he calls us as well, a purpose which can help both us, and others, satisfy these significant yearnings. [READ TEXT]

I. Living in the Epilogue

A. I don’t know about you, but I am always disappointed when a good book comes to an end. When you’ve gotten to know the characters and it feels like you have become friends, and it seems that you were right there with them as they worked through and brought to resolution a major problem or challenge, you really want to know what happens next! It can feel as if you are left hanging. That’s why I’m glad when an author includes an epilogue, a brief description of what happens after the story is “over.” Because really, the end of a story is never really the end; it is the beginning of something new.

B. This is so very true of the gospel story. If you’ve followed the life of Jesus from his birth to his death, if you’ve gotten to know his disciples, felt like you’ve traveled with them, and seen how the problem of human sin—which threads its way through the entire story—becomes resolved by his death and resurrection, then, is the story over? Or is there more to come? What happens next? Does the resurrection of Jesus affect the future in any way? What are the disciples to do now? Is there an epilogue to this gospel story?

C. Fortunately, there is! Each gospel account in its own way makes it clear that the resurrection of Jesus is not the end, it is only the beginning. Each gospel points to the mission of the church and its work in the world and what is needed to carry out this mission effectively. John 21 is the epilogue we’ll consider, both today, and next week. It is, we could say, the most interesting and fascinating epilogue ever written because it includes us; we are living, even today, in this epilogue.

Let’s move through the text we just read using three statements that are made.

II. “I’m going out to fish.”

A. This statement is made by Peter, who, along with six others, has traveled the 75 miles or so north, from Jerusalem to Galilee. How long this journey took place after the first two resurrection appearances of Jesus to his disciples we can’t be sure. While those appearances of Jesus seem to have helped his followers move beyond their grief and the fear that had filled them following his crucifixion, a bit of purposelessness seemed to have set in. He’d hinted that they’d be doing great things, but what that looked like no one really knew. Not knowing what else to do, Peter opts for a return to normal, a return to fishing. It’s what his partners knew best as well and so they said, “Great idea Pete; we’ll go with you.” It seemed like the right thing to do.

B. And who could really blame them? We're all longing for a return to "normal" in our lives these days. Best get on with life, we figure. These guys had families who needed looking after and had probably been not so gently suggesting that after their three-year adventure with this Jesus fellow it was time to settle back down and do something sensible, like earning some money! It doesn't seem like they were expecting Jesus to show up in a way that really mattered; but to be fair, are we any more expectant? In any event, when these fishermen returned to normal, we read that they had a rough go of it. Although they had been out all night, it was not a fruitful expedition; they caught nothing. As it turns out, Jesus had a "better normal" in mind for them.

III. "Friends, haven't you any fish?"

A. It began as the new day dawned and, as these fishermen made their way back to shore, they heard a voice calling out from a figure standing on the beach. "Friends, haven't you any fish?" Though it sounds friendly enough, how would you have heard it? You're tired, you're cold, you're muscles ache, you're hungry, and some wise guy from the campsite next to yours is standing there with his coffee in one hand and donut in the other reminding you of your failure. Where'd he get that donut, anyway?!

B. Do you know that this is often the way of God? Not to get us to thinking of ourselves as failures, but asking questions that help us to reflect and face what has happened in our lives, especially in those places where we have sought to live in our own strength. "Adam, where are you?" is the first and probably the most famous (Ge. 3:9). It's not that God didn't know where Adam was externally; rather, God wanted Adam to face where he had gone internally.

C. The underlying question for the disciples seemed to be, "How has your self-reliance worked out for you, even in your area of expertise?" To complete the lesson, Jesus instructs them to throw their nets over on the other side of the boat and when they do, they catch 153 large ones. It was an abundance, in other words, an abundance that matched the very first miracle that Jesus has performed, also in the region of Galilee, that of turning water into 150 gallons of wine (Jn. 2:1-11)! It's a picture of glory that frames the gospel, a glory that Jesus brings when we wait on him and allow him to lead us.

D. The catch would also have triggered, I think, a memory from three years earlier when Peter had experienced a similar catch after following the guidance and direction of Jesus. At that point, Jesus used the object lesson to teach Peter that he and his colleagues would be involved in fishing for people (Lk. 5:1-11), in helping others experience the glory of life in his kingdom. Now, he reminds Peter of this missional purpose for what would become his church, as well as affirming that in undertaking this mission, Jesus, through the gift of his Spirit, must guide and direct all that we do. Are we willing to trust that he knows best? Do we know how to listen to him?

Illustration: As you make your way, either driving or walking through our neighborhoods, this is the time of year you see boat owners beginning to remove the winter shrink wrap or tarp from their boat, and make preparations for putting that boat in the water. Now, I don't know if you are a motorboat type or a sailboat type but it does seem that our human nature seems to gravitate toward the motorboat. We like to envision ourselves as the helm, thrusting the throttle forward to engage our powerful motors and plowing through the waves, going wherever, and how fast, we want to go. In a sailboat, by contrast, you simply raise the sails and wait for the wind to blow and take you where, and how, it wills.

This latter option, the sailboat, is more like how Jesus calls his followers to live. Not plowing forward under our own strength, wherever and however we think best, but moving along where and how the breath of the Spirit blows. That, of course, takes discipline, a hoisting of our "sails." It takes the disciplines of waiting upon God, not inactively, but intentionally through prayer, and other formational

habits, like the “Pandemic 10” we’ve been sending you, that open our lives, as individuals and as a church, to the guidance of the Spirit of Christ.

IV. “Come and have breakfast.”

A. Along the way, we can be assured that Jesus will not only guide us but sustain us. We hear this in his invitation, “Come and have breakfast.” When these guys got to shore, hungry as they must have been, they could smell the grilling of the fish that Jesus had been preparing for them. He directs them to add some of what they had just caught, indicating, I think, the missional partnership that he invites us into, or perhaps to help us picture that we are to bring who we “catch” to Jesus. Either way, whether it’s a multitude of 5,000 (Jn. 6:11), or whoever 153 fish represent, or just seven disciples, it’s his mission, it’s his table, and he is the host. As we join him in what he is doing, he promises to feed us and nourish us as along the way.

B. As he feeds us, we remember his word, “Man doesn’t live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Ma. 4:4). Part of our “daily bread,” in other words, as we step out on this fish-catching mission with Jesus, is time spent munching on his word. It is there that we will find his great love for us described. It is there that we will learn of his promises and purposes for his people. It is there that we will find the ground of our hope. Without such nourishment, we will not make it far. So let’s consider this in light of those three great human yearnings.

1. Take justice. Where does a yearning for justice come from? What prompted you as a little child to shout out on the playground, “That isn’t fair!” Or to exclaim the same as you, now an adult, read the news? How do you determine what is just, or not, without Jesus? Could it be that Jesus, who took on our injustice and bore the ultimate justice of God on the cross, might know a thing or two about what is just, and about how we might go about pursuing it?

2. How about our yearning for community? In this stay at home world in which we’ve been living, it’s clear that while peace and quiet can be a gift, we certainly do miss being with others! It might help us understand why solitary confinement is the worst punishment imaginable. Where does such a yearning for community come from? Could it be that as creatures created in the image of a relational God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—that we are relational beings at our core? And might not this relational God know a thing or two about what true community really looks like, and how to live within it?

3. And then there’s hope. Everyone needs it; everyone has it; we couldn’t get up out of bed for long without it. But where does it come from, what is its ground, and what is its end? What makes hope more than just wishful thinking? Could it be that the one who defeated our most hopeless situation—death—by rising from the dead, could provide a solid ground, and end, for hope that nothing else can?

We can have this sense, you see, that living with our hands on the throttle, that thinking it would be easier to live without God somehow looking over our shoulder, would be the best and easiest way to go, whether we’re in the church, or not. But, as Jesus asked those fishermen when he saw their empty nets, “how’s that been workin’ out for ya?” The risen Jesus has overcome injustice, knows what real community is all about, and is the rock on which the hope of the world rests. As we raise our sails to fill our spirits with his Spirit, may he satisfy us with the purpose that comes from helping those with whom we live, learn, work, and play, come to know justice, community, and hope.