

“Healing after Breakfast”

Introduction: This Sunday we are still in the epilogue of John’s gospel, the chapter at the end of his work which tells us what comes next, the chapter in which we learn that the resurrection of Jesus is not the end but only the beginning of what Jesus will now do through his church. What Jesus intends to do is reveal to the world that through his death and resurrection, a life of hardship and sorrow and lament is not only present with us, but that a life of goodness and beauty and joy is possible, a life in which justice and community, hope and healing begin to bubble to the surface of our world. In order to join Jesus in this, we saw last week that we need to listen to and trust in his guidance and direction.

In that listening and trust, there is one thing we need to make sure that we hear. It is the one thing that unless we get it into our hearts, it will not be possible to either experience for ourselves, or share with others, the life that Jesus brings. And that one thing is how desperately and how deeply God loves us. We find this in Jesus’ poignant, after-breakfast conversation with Peter. Jesus knows that Peter cannot really join him in what he is doing until he understands that he is fully forgiven, loved without condition, and, above all, released from the paralyzing grip that guilt and shame have on him.

If guilt is something we feel because we have done something bad, and shame is what we feel when we come to believe that we *are* bad. Neither are healthy places. Where might Jesus need to release you from their grip so that, knowing how deeply loved you are, you can wonderfully and freely join him in his purposes? [READ]

I. Beginning at the Beginning

A. I’d like to begin not by talking about Jesus and Peter in John, but about Adam and Eve in Genesis. At the conclusion of Genesis 2 we have reached the culmination of creation in which all of its raw material has been assigned its function and its name. God has set things up so that his world will be one of joyful discovery and culture-making for the humans he has put in charge. Those human beings are described in this way: “Adam and his wife were both naked, and they felt no shame” (Ge. 2:25).

B. As he ruminates on this description, Curt Thompson, a psychiatrist who specializes in the interaction between neurobiology and Christian spiritual formation, wonders why it is that the writer ends in this way. He could have said, Thompson suggests, that the man and woman were naked and really happy (who wouldn’t be, he offers?!). Or, that they were naked and strong and confident. Or, that they were naked and not afraid or angry or sad. While all of these may have been true, with these and so many other possibilities to choose from, why focus on shame? Thompson believes, and I think the biblical narrative bears this out, it’s because “shame is the emotional fulcrum around which the history of sin rotates” (*The Soul of Shame*, 99). Put another way, shame is the primary tool evil wields in order to rupture the core of our various relationships, with God, with ourselves, and with our neighbor.

C. As the next chapter in Genesis goes on to reveal, the evil one got Adam and Eve to believe that God was holding something back from them, got them to doubt that they were good enough for God to put everything in their care, and got them to conclude that God didn’t really trust them or love them very much, if at all. Instead of fact checking with God, the couple succumbed to Satan’s lies. After they had trusted Satan’s story instead of God’s, they discovered that they had become frighteningly vulnerable and naked, tried to cover themselves with fig leaves, ran off and tried to hide (the natural

response to shame), and began pointing fingers at one another, all a part of the “rotten fruit” of shame. Adam and Eve were no longer naked and without shame; they were covered and filled with shame.

II. Breakfast on the Beach

A. Fast forward to the end of John’s re-creation account and see Peter doing the very curious thing of putting on his clothes before jumping in the water and making his way toward Jesus. Might it be that Peter felt the need to cover himself before facing his Friend, Savior, and Lord? After all, he had, not that long ago, declared that he would stick with Jesus, even through prison and death. But then, after Jesus had been arrested, while sitting around a charcoal fire in the courtyard of the high priest, Peter denied ever having known Jesus, not once, not twice, but three times. As he did so the third time a rooster crowed, which was the sound Jesus had told Peter he would hear upon his third denial. It led Peter to flee the scene and weep bitterly, but not before seeing Jesus looking across the courtyard at him (Lk. 22:33-34, 54-62). Don’t you wonder what that look was like?

B. And don’t you wonder what memories must have filled Peter’s mind and heart when, upon arriving on the shore, he not only saw the flames, but smelled the smoke of that charcoal fire upon which Jesus was cooking fish? The word that describes this fire is found in only these two places in the NT, the place of Peter’s failure and now at the place of Peter’s forgiveness. For that is the direction in which Jesus took the conversation after breakfast had been served. Jesus wanted to take Peter to a place of healing, a healing of his guilt, and a healing of the shame that seemed to be creeping into Peter’s life. For the truth of the matter is that shame often follows quite subtly, but surely, after guilt. And if shame takes over our lives, if feeling that we are bad, unworthy, and unlovable becomes the story that we live in, it becomes very difficult for us to participate in the goodness and beauty of what he is now doing.

III. Healing after Breakfast

A. The process of repair requires us to confront the reality of the wound that has taken place. The healing of shame requires us to be vulnerable, with another, or with a number of others, the very thing that shame tries to avoid. But Jesus refused to let Peter avoid it. Like with Adam and Eve, thinking they were hiding in the Garden, Jesus demonstrates how God knows everything about us and still pursues us; his desire is to enable us to confront our shame while not being overrun by it. Don’t miss that he began with love, he began by feeding Peter breakfast. No conversation was had until Peter had been nourished by Jesus. Then, gently but persistently, Jesus forces Peter to face his three-fold denial by asking him three times about Peter’s love for him. After each, Jesus gives Peter something to do in his service, a way for him to know that he truly was forgiven, that Jesus really did love Peter. Even though he knew everything about him, he did desire for Peter to join him in his purposes. Though it can take a while, Jesus was shifting Peter’s attention away from the story of shame he had begun to tell himself and toward the story of Jesus and his great love for him.

Illustration: It’s like you and a friend were walking down the street one night, only to be attacked by thugs. You run away to save your skin, and leave your friend, who is not so fast, to be pummeled. The next day you see your friend coming toward you with scratches and stitches and bruises and broken bones, and before you can say anything, your friend comes up to you, hugs you, and says, “Oh, it’s so good to see you. I’m so glad that you’re ok.”

B. The evil one would love for us to believe that everything with us is not OK, that God is not well-pleased with us. Satan would love for us to believe that we are not important enough or worthy enough for God to stick with us. But God is not leaving the room; in fact, in Jesus, God breaks into the rooms of our lives even when we think we have the doors securely locked (cf. Jn. 20:19, 26).

Just how “sticky” God is can be seen on the cross. In this regard, the writer of the letter to the Hebrews gives us a glimpse of this, and what Jesus did with shame in the process (Heb. 12:1b-2):

And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Jesus endured the cross for our sake. Forgiveness is not just a matter of God winking at us in the face of our idolatry, lust, greed, judging, lying, etc., and saying “we’re cool!” Rather, he took responsibility for all of that stuff and absorbed it into himself so that he could extinguish it in his death. In the process, note what he did with shame: he scorned it. He acknowledges it and then he turns his back on it, paying no more attention to it but paying attention instead to the joy of being in his Father’s presence, the same one who tells us we are his sons and daughters, and that he is deeply pleased we are on this earth.

With his help, in the power of his love, Jesus calls us to do the same. He calls us to acknowledge our guilt, and the shame it can bring us, and then to “scorn it,” to turn from it and turn toward him (confession and repentance) so that the incredibly true story of how we are loved, not the false story that says we are bad, is what we pay attention to, what informs us, and what we follow into whatever the future may hold.