

Date: May 5, 2019

Occasion: 10:00am Service (St. Andrews Episcopal Church)

Text: John 21.1-19

Title: "St. Peter's Fireside Chat"

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Introduction: Resurrection Appearances

He is risen! *He is risen indeed! Hallelujah!*

May we never tire of rejoicing in that fact.

He is risen...

The Gospel of John records three "appearances" of the risen Lord to his followers...

1. Appears to Mary Magdalene weeping in the garden near the tomb
2. Appears to the disciples huddled together in a house behind locked doors
3. Appears to Peter and the disciples on the beach after an unsuccessful night of fishing

In each appearance, Jesus does two things...

1. He enters into some aspect of his followers' experience
 - a. Mary's grief
 - b. The disciples' fear
 - c. Peter's lack of success and, as we will see in a moment, his denial
2. He gives his followers' a new vocation/mission
 - a. Mary, go tell the other disciples I'm alive
 - b. Disciples, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you."
 - c. Peter, "Feed my sheep."

When the risen Jesus appears...

- He enters into some aspect of his disciples' experience
- He gives his disciples' a new vocation/mission

Our Gospel reading this morning focuses our attention on the third of these resurrection appearances.

There is **fire**, **food**, and the command to "**feed**".

(1) Fire (v.9)

v.9...

“**charcoal fire**” = or “a heap of burning coals” (Gk. *anthrakion*) = very specific detail

- Unique word that only occurs twice in the Gospel of John
- First occurrence = Peter warms himself at a “**charcoal fire**” when he denies Jesus
- John wants us to know that Jesus invites the disciples to breakfast around a charcoal fire in particular.

Q: What is Jesus doing here, according to John?

As many of you know, many studies have been done in recent years on the nature of human memory. And many of these studies have provided scientific evidence for a phenomenon that we already knew to be true by experience – namely, that memory is deeply interconnected with the physical senses.

Examples...

- Sit at a particular table in a local café, and it brings back painful memories of a difficult conversation I had with someone when I last sat in that spot
- Walk by a woman in town, and the smell of her perfume reminds me of my first girlfriend when I was 11 years old – I have a good laugh!
- Someone raises their voice in a conversation, and I shut down because I am reminded of what it was like to interact with my Father when his voice got like that

Memories have a powerful effect on us – they mark our lives and become irrevocable parts of our identities, whether we like it or not. And memories are so often attached to particular sights, smells, and sounds.

Now, image Peter approaching that “**charcoal fire**”. The sight of white-hot burning embers, of flickering flames. The smell of smoke and char. The sound of sizzling fish and crackling wood.

AND imagine the memories that would come to Peter’s mind – painful and shameful memories from just a handful of days ago, when he denied the very one he now approaches.

There are only two places where we get this image in the Gospel of John, and John wants us to make the connection.

Around the first fire (18:18), Peter denies Jesus.

Around the second fire (21:9), Jesus invites Peter.

Jesus is intentionally taking Peter back to the place of pain, of betrayal, of denial... to the place where things went so horribly wrong.

Q: Have you ever had a sense in a relationship (with a spouse, friend, son or daughter) that the relationship is not going to move forward (grow, mature, reach its full potential) unless you first go back and deal with something from the past?

A time when you felt betrayed or misunderstood; or when you broke that person's trust and confidence; or when there was a misunderstanding and breakdown in communication that caused pain and frustration and anger, damage and distance.

Jesus is taking Peter back the place of pain, of damage, of denial, and he is doing it so that he and Peter can move forward.

Unlike us, Jesus is not afraid to face pain, to enter into areas of brokenness, to address relational breakdowns and betrayals.

As he so often does, Jesus goes where others would rather not go, where we would rather not go.

Shame, brokenness, weakness... give it whatever name you want.

We run from it, but HE enters into it.

And he invites us, like Peter, to go there with him.

Application: Brothers and sisters, where is Jesus inviting you to go with him this morning?

- Is it an unfulfilled dream or desire that continues to grieve you?
- Is it a particular sin from the past that continues to burden you?
- Is it a particular relational dynamic that just won't go away (no matter how much you try to bury it), but continues to nag and rear its ugly head?
- Is it something as simple as refusing to identify yourself with Jesus?

Like he does with Peter, Jesus invites you and me to our own "**charcoal fire**", and he invites us to openly and honestly face with the pain of our denials, sins, fears, our burdens.

First there is **fire**, but then there is **food**.

(2) Food (vv.9-14)

Q: What happens around the fire? What does Jesus do when he goes to those places in our lives we would rather not go, and invites us to go there with him?

vv.9-13...

Jesus' public ministry begins with providing wine at a wedding, and now ends with preparing a meal for his disciples.

What does Jesus do around the fire?

He feeds, nourishes, prepares a meal.

We get an image of Jesus treating Peter (treating us) as a Host would treat his honoured guests.

It is an act of radical hospitality and of restorative generosity.

AND notice how John inserts v.14 at this point...

v.14...

As if to remind us of WHO it is that we encounter around the fire.

This is the one who was raised from the dead, who was declared Lord Almighty, who is worthy of all honour and glory, who is God in the flesh.

It is THIS ONE who acts in this way towards Peter, towards us...

What He says is what God says...

- **Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast."**

What He does is what God does...

- **Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.**

In the ancient world, a meal was a very significant relational marker.

It was a culture that revolved around hospitality. If you eat with someone, then you are identified with that person, you are friend or family.

Eating together was an act of intimate fellowship.

Jesus said to them, “Come and have breakfast.”

Jesus came and took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish.

Notice what Jesus is doing...

Inviting Peter to join him around a charcoal fire – the very place where Peter broke fellowship with Jesus – and offering a meal.

In other words, he invites Peter into friendship and fellowship at the very place and point where Peter broke it.

This is how Jesus treats his deniers.

This is how Jesus treats us.

And I know this is not what the text is specifically about, but I cannot help but think about the Eucharist.

The risen Lord Jesus as our Host, extending table fellowship to broken and weary sinners.

First **fire**, then **food**, and finally... the command to **“feed”**.

(3) Feed (vv.15-17)

At the first fire in the Gospel of John, Peter was asked three times if he knew Jesus and was one of his followers. Three times Peter denied it.

At the second fire, Jesus asks Peter three times if he loves him. In a sense, offering Peter an opportunity for restoration and renewed relationship.

And each time, Jesus responds to Peter's confession of love with a very specific command.

vv.15-17...

"Feed my lambs." "Tend my sheep." "Feed my sheep."

There is so much that could be said here, but I will limit it to two observations...

(1) Jesus invites Peter to feed others only after Peter has himself first eaten.

In other words, Peter must receive before he can give.

To state it in the negative, we cannot give what we have not first received.

We saw this in John 13...

- Peter, if you don't let me wash your feet, you can't have anything to do with me

Key to loving and serving others well is allowing Lord Jesus to love and serve you.

We cannot give what we have not first received.

(2) Jesus commands Peter to share in the same ministry he has received from Jesus.

Jesus fed him, now he feeds others.

Now, there is a key difference: only Jesus' ministry is redemptive in itself.

Peter's ministry only has efficacy in so far as it bears witness to and participates in Jesus' ministry the Good Shepherd.

BUT the key point is this: Grace is given to be shared.

We see this principle are work over and over again in the Gospel of John.

Jesus says in John 13...

- **“If I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.”**

Grace is given to be shared.

Which begs the question: How is Jesus inviting you and me to share his grace?

The whole point of Peter's encounter with the risen Lord is not that Peter would be healed of his sins and go away happy and free of guilt.

Nothing wrong with that, but that's not the point of this passage!

The point is that Peter is restored and therefore ready to receive a new mission and vocation in life!!

Jesus heals us so that we may be a blessing to others, so that we may be equipped and empowered to do that kingdom work God has for us to do.

For Peter: **“Feed my lambs.” “Tend my sheep.” “Feed my sheep.”**

In other words, shepherd my people.

What is it for you?

What is it for me?

What is it for us, for St. Andrews Episcopal Church in May of 2019?

In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

