

## **Breakfast on the Beach**

LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church

April 23, 2023 AM Sermon

Reverend Peter Jonker

John 21:1-14

For Peter, James, John and the other disciples in the boat, that weary disappointed feeling was something they were used to. They'd been fishing since they could remember. As young boys they'd been out on the boats with their fathers, going out in the middle of the night when the fishing was best. All night long they'd throw their nets over the side and then drag them back in again. Sometimes when you dragged the nets in you could feel the wriggle of the fish coming through the net and into your hands as you pulled it up; the net vibrated with their life. You felt the fish before you saw them. That was a good feeling, a satisfying feeling. Often though, the nets were just heavy and damp in your hands. No life. No vibration. Dead weight. You knew all your pulling and straining was for nothing. The old timers used to say that an empty net felt heavier than a full one. The old timers were right.

Sometimes you'd have a night where there was nothing but dead weight all night long. Those were the worst. It would be a long ride back to shore on those mornings. After a good night, the ride home would be full of chatter and laughter, the sound of men's hearts lifted up. On the mornings when the boat was empty, it was dead quiet and everyone was short tempered.

Things were very quiet that morning as the disciples rowed back to shore. They'd been shut-out. All they had for their effort were sore hands and sore backs. They were tired and frustrated. And that frustration seemed heavier because it was not what they expected after the resurrection. Just a few days ago, they had seen the risen Lord and it had been so amazing. It had been such a spiritual high. Their hearts burned within them in his presence, they were bursting with joy, it felt like everything had changed! But Jesus left that night and now a week had gone by and they'd not seen him since. And honestly, at ground level, it didn't seem like the rest of the world had changed. The laundry still had to be done, food had to be put on the table, and bills had to be paid. All the demands and problems of everyday life had not evaporated. And so Peter finally said, "I can't keep sitting around, I'm going fishing." And the rest of them joined in. "Good idea. Count me in." Pretty soon they were setting out on the Sea of Galilee doing this very familiar thing: making a living. Making ends meet. Which was a little disappointing. Is this what the resurrection life was going to be like? The same struggles and obligations? The same grind? Christ is risen, and I have debts to pay.

Their tense silence was broken by a voice from the shore. A man was there. They couldn't tell who he was. He was a hundred yards away. They thought they could see the light of a fire behind him, the smoke rising up against the morning sky. His voice came to them clearly across the water: "Hey boys!" he cried, "Haven't you caught any fish?"

This resurrection encounter is different from all the other ones in the New Testament. It's different in tone and it's different in location. This is an everyday, workday setting. This encounter takes place in the middle of the work life of ordinary people with all its demands and frustrations. And because it takes place in a unique setting, I hear it addressing a unique question: Where is the risen Lord in the midst of our everyday, mundane lives? Where do we find him in the grind of life with its work and its routines and its demands? Because, let's be honest, most of our life is lived in those working places where we're dealing with life's pressures and responsibilities, and it's not always easy to see Jesus in those places. Often in those places we are just tired.

We need the good news of the resurrection in those places too. We know we need the resurrection proclaimed at crisis moments. We need the resurrection proclaimed at the gravesides of the people we love, where death confronts us with its full weight. In those places we need the story of Jesus shouting at Lazarus' grave: "Lazarus come out!" or we need the bold proclamation of the angel on Easter morning, "He is not here! He is risen!" But for the days when the power of death doesn't confront us directly, but works on us more subtly through the slow grind of fatigue and disappointment, perhaps we need the man on the beach. The man who's a 100 yards away so that we can't quite make out who he is. What does this story say to us about the presence of the resurrected Lord in our ordinary workday lives? This story tells us that the resurrected Lord is beside us in

the grind of our everyday life. The disciples don't recognize Jesus because he's so far away, and they don't have any sense that he's been present on their fishing trip. But Jesus has been with them the whole time. We can see that because Jesus knows that they've had a terrible night! "Friends, haven't you any fish?" How does he know that? How does he know they've been shut out? He's a hundred yards away! He can't see whether or not there's fish on the deck. He knows because he's been with them. He knows about their sore hands and their sore backs, he knows about their disappointment.

And notice what he does, he gently encourages them to keep going in their work, he gently encourages them to persist in their labors. 'Don't give up! Keep going! Just throw your net over the side one more time.' They do and when they pull it up the net vibrates in their hands like never before; it thrums with the life of 153 fishes. And at that moment they recognize the one who has been with them all along. 'It is the Lord!' says John. Before you know it Peter is over the side of the boat making a beeline for Jesus.

When it comes to seeing Jesus, the pattern of recognition here is so typical of the pattern of recognition in our own life. We work and struggle and labor day by day, and in the middle of all that we often feel as if we are alone against our stuff. Lord, do you see me down here, trying to care for my kid? Do you see me trying to care for my ailing husband? Do you see me trying to hold my life together? We don't feel or see Jesus anywhere, but then all of a sudden we come to a spot in the journey where the terrain changes, trees open up, the clouds lift and we realize "It is the Lord! Jesus it's you! You were there all along! You were in the boat with me all along." It's the pattern you see in Joseph. After all his struggles: hated by his brothers, enslaved, thrown in jail on false accusations, but then one day he finds himself the ruler of Egypt and the savior of his family. The fog lifts and he says, 'Oh my goodness, others intended it for evil, but Lord, you were in this for good all along.'

The young parents struggle to raise their challenging child. They work and they pray. They go through long nights of worry, and days of arguments in the kitchen and slammed doors and shouting matches. But then one day the child stands up in church and makes profession and says to them, "Thanks Mom, thanks Dad, I couldn't have done it without you!" And lying in their bed at night they realize, "Oh my goodness, Jesus you were in the boat with me all along." When it comes to the daily struggles of our life and work, I am convinced that all of us will come to a point where the fog will lift and the goodness of God will shine forth and we will say, "Lord you were in this all along! You were in the middle of all the pain and sweat and worry, working for good." That might happen to you in this life, and blessed are you if it does, or it will happen to you on the shore of a different sea, the Crystal Sea, where Jesus won't just serve us breakfast; he will serve us a wedding feast.

Let me say a few words about that breakfast. That might be my favorite part of this whole passage. It's another sign that Jesus has been with them through all their struggles on the boat. He knew they were coming, he knew that when they got to shore they would be hungry, so he made them breakfast. I think there is more grace and hope in that breakfast than in the miracle. The tired disciples get to the beach and there's a little fire crackling away, with some fish on it and a little bread. In that fire and in that meal, it's as if Jesus is saying, "Come sit down, I know you are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Not only has the resurrected Lord been with them, the resurrected Lord has been out ahead of them preparing food for their weary bodies and their weary souls. Not only was Jesus with them on the boat; he's gone ahead to prepare a place for them.

When I was a kid I slept in the basement of my parent's house; me and my brother shared a room. I have distinct memories of waking up in the morning and what that felt like. I had an old school red LED alarm clock on the nightstand beside me, and it went off at 6:54 every morning. I would wake up and get out of bed, and above me I could hear the sounds of my parents in the kitchen. The gentle sound of their voices would murmur through the floorboards. I would hear the muted sound of dishes being pulled out and knives and forks coming out of drawers. It was such a comforting sound because it told me that my parents were up ahead of me, making breakfast, getting things ready for me and my siblings. It made me feel secure and loved. These days I am the first one up at my house, the only person waiting for me is the dog, and she needs things from me. She wants to be fed and walked. Which I do in the early morning darkness. Out there in the dark, it's easy to feel that there's nothing standing between me and the weight of my responsibilities. There's no one preparing the way, there's no one making breakfast; it's just me against the morning. But in this story the Holy Spirit says to me, says to all of us, that's not true. Jesus is up ahead of you and me, out there in the cold and the dark, lighting fires

against the darkness. He's setting a table of good food, milk and honey. Daily bread. He's making breakfast and he's making it for us.

Did you know that John Calvin and Martin Luther wanted communion at every church service? It's true. They wanted weekly communion. Most churches in the Reformed tradition don't do that. LaGrave doesn't do that, mostly because of the logistics and the time. But Calvin wanted it and its passages like this that help me to see why. It's a beautiful thing to come into church on a Sunday morning and to see that Jesus has made breakfast for you. That he's been up before you getting things ready. He knows you're tired and that the week has been hard and so he made you this meal. Seeing that table when you walk in is a sign that he is out ahead of you preparing a place for you. Not just in eternity, but in today and tomorrow and all the tomorrows after that.

At the end of our passage you have that interesting verse where John says, "None of the disciples dared ask, "who are you?" because they all knew it was Jesus." People have wondered about that verse. Was there some question in their minds about whether this was actually Jesus? Were they uncertain? No I don't think so. That can't be it. John has already said "It is the Lord." They all knew.

I think that this is more of a holy silence. Have you ever been at a beach fire with a few people whom you love and who know you really well and the light is getting low and you're all tired and you just fall silent together listening to the sound of the fire crackling, listening to the rhythm of the waves, and you feel the perfection, and the peace of the moment, and you all just sit in quiet and let the grace and the peace of the moment fill you? I think that's what's going on there. The frustration of their failed fishing trip has been replaced by the perfect peace of this breakfast with Jesus and no one wants to spoil the perfect silence with foolish questions. No one wants to pick apart the holy mystery with impertinent inquiries. They want rest in the perfect grace of that moment that Jesus has prepared for them.

Wouldn't you love to be at that fire? Sitting there with the disciples, sitting with Jesus hearing the fire crackle, the fish sizzling, the morning sky brightening, letting the perfect peace and security of that moment wash over you. That fire is still burning you know, and Jesus is still out ahead of you preparing food, and he still says to you, "Come, and have breakfast."

©Rev. Peter Jonker