

SERMON: Confronted by the Risen Christ
TEXT: John 21:1-19

5-1-22

First of all, breakfast on the beach with the risen Jesus? Yes, please! Eggs over medium, crispy bacon, french toast, and coffee for me. Let's eat! Unfortunately though, my choices were not on the menu the day that Jesus cooked for the disciples. Oh, well. As long as there's something hot and tasty to fill my belly and the topic of conversation is love, count me in.

In one sense, it may seem like Jesus' ministry on earth is finished. I think I even made that point in a sermon just a few weeks ago. When Jesus declared from the cross, "It is finished," and then took his last breath, we thought that was the end of the story.

On the other hand, as important as Jesus' teachings were during his life on earth and while he was dying on the cross, perhaps we should pay *even closer attention* to what the *risen*

Jesus has to say. No one expected this, and now we have to figure out what it all means.

In the depths of our grief, we found the tomb empty and were greeted by the risen Lord. This changes the whole story, and leaves us with more questions than answers. His death was not the end, nor did his resurrection bring completion. Now we find Jesus appearing to his disciples on more than one occasion.

Today, he's serving breakfast on the beach.

As the passage begins, it seems as though Peter, along with several other disciples, has returned to his occupation as a fisherman.

"Simon 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. Just after daybreak, Jesus stood on the beach; but the disciples did not know that it was

Jesus. Jesus said to them, 'Children, you have no fish, have you?' They answered him, 'No.' He 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. That disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, 'It is the Lord!'"

You can feel the *deja vu*, can't you? Peter and the others have been through this scenario before, when Jesus was alive. In fact, this is what opens their eyes to recognize Jesus. Then he invites them, "Come and have breakfast."

One commentary I read explained that the disciples really didn't know what to do with themselves during these post-resurrection days. Joy J. Moore, Professor of Biblical Preaching wrote: "Rather than mere apologetic or intellectual proofs, the writer of John brings testimony to the invitation that has always been the concern of the God of Israel: the redemption and reconciliation of all humanity and creation. For that reason, another chapter indicates we have not arrived at the end of the

story. Resurrection appearances confirmed and Jesus' Lordship confessed is an invitation, not a conclusion. Having heard the Easter events, what is there for the community to do now?...

Days pass into weeks since the reports of the empty tomb were confirmed by Jesus' appearances among those who knew him best. The disciples were waiting on the Spirit Jesus had promised but they didn't know what to do while they waited. Going back to what they did before all the hope and hype seemed a good option. But the events of triumph over tragedy are not to send the disciples to a life of their past." (Joy J. Moore, Commentary on John 21:1-19, www.workingpreacher.org, May 5, 2019)

Speaking of waiting on the spirit, I saw a photo recently that showed a person kneeling on a bed, with head in hands, labeled, "Me, depressed, anxious, and feeling worthless." On the other side of the room, the photo shows a cat, sailing through the air after jumping from the top shelf of a bookcase. It is easy to discern the trajectory of the cat and the clear landing point square on the back of the one labeled "me." The cat is also

labeled as “the Holy Spirit, bringing a big ol’ dose of the love, grace, and mercy of Christ.”

Indeed, the appearance of the Holy Spirit can be surprising, and often comes when you least expect it.

Back to the scripture, you might say that Jesus confronts Peter in a similar fashion.

“When 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.’ A 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.’ He 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.’”

When Jesus asks the same question a third time, it does begin to feel like the confrontation is escalating to a surprise attack from a cat landing on your back. And we understand why Peter is feeling hurt. He's probably wondering, "Why does Jesus keep asking the same question? Does he not believe that I love him? Does he not trust me to be faithful? Does he think I'm going to change my mind and suddenly turn on him?" And that's when it dawns on us. Peter has promised his undying loyalty to Jesus before, and failed to live up to it. Three times.

Peter, whom Jesus nicknamed the *Rock* upon which the church would be built, has truly been CONFRONTED BY THE RISEN CHRIST. Confronted with the challenge to put his words into action. Confronted with an opportunity to be a leader for other believers. Confronted with a chance to make amends for his previous denials of Jesus.

Max Lucado is a pastor and author who writes about what he calls the Gospel of Second Chances. Often he shares Peter's story

and the passage from John that we're looking at today. Lucado also refers to a verse from the resurrection story in the gospel of Mark: "But go, tell his disciples *and Peter*, 'He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you.'"

Peter is singled out from the rest of the disciples because he is the one in greatest need of redemption at that moment. He has been living with the shame of having denied and abandoned Jesus at his moment of greatest need. Back to our scripture from John, many theologians emphasize the reason that Jesus asks Peter three times, "Do you love me?" As Peter answers, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you" more adamantly each time, each of his denials is canceled out. Forgiven.

Peter has been CONFRONTED BY THE RISEN CHRIST with an opportunity to repent and be forgiven. But that's not all.

Three times Jesus asks Peter, "Do you love me?" Three times Peter says, "Yes, Lord." And three times Jesus responds, "Feed

my lambs; tend my sheep; feed my sheep.” Words of love are not enough. Peter, along with all who would follow, is CONFRONTED BY THE RISEN CHRIST with a call to action. To shepherd the flock. To serve the vulnerable. To feed the hungry.

Just as Christ has shepherded us, cared for us, fed us, and loved us, we are called to show our love for him by serving others.

Now, Jesus invites us to be fed and nurtured and strengthened at his table, so that we can continue our lives of faithful love and service. May we answer, “Yes, Lord, we love you,” to the glory of God!

AMEN.