

“Come and Have Breakfast”  
John 21:1-19  
Sunday, April 10, 2016  
The Rev. Sharon Snapp-Kolas, preaching

Scripture. Prayer.

**Opening.**

There’s a story about a Sunday morning in Wyoming:

“[Now], out in Wyoming's ranching country a severe snowstorm hit the area the Sunday before Christmas. Although the minister felt certain that nobody was going to show up for his church service because of the weather, he opened up the church just in case someone might appear. Sure enough, through the cold and snow, a weather-beaten cowboy appeared in the doorway of the church. The minister did not recognize the man as one of his parishioners, however he invited him in and the cowboy took a seat near the back of the church. After a wait of 20 minutes, it became apparent to the minister that this cowboy was going to be the only person to attend his church that day. Approaching the man, the minister asked him if he was expecting a full service. ‘I've been a cowboy out in this part of the country all my life,’ the fellow answered. ‘And all winter long I feed 500 cows every day. And come rain or shine, sleet or snow -- whether one comes or all 500 come -- I feed them every day.’ Duly inspired, the minister launched into a sermon that lasted the better part of an hour and a half. At the conclusion, the minister walked over to the cowboy and asked him how he enjoyed the service. ‘Like I said before,’ the cowboy answered, ‘I've been feeding 500 cows every day all my life. And come rain or shine, sleet or snow -- whether one comes or all 500 come -- I feed them every day. But if only one cow comes, I don't dump the whole feed load.’” (Dennis Marquardt)

John chapter 21 is an epilogue to John’s gospel. Some might say “the whole feed load” has been dumped, and chapter 21 is not needed. The author of the epilogue – whether it be John

or a member of John's community – disagrees.

The last verses of chapter 20 sound like we have come to the end of the book. “Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not written in this book. But these are written so that you may come to believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that through believing you may have life in his name” (20:30-31). The End. Or so we could say.

But it seems the story is not over. There is more to be told. And so chapter 21 is written.

### **I. We need Jesus' guidance.**

We need Jesus' guidance.

The epilogue begins with the disciples fishing all night but catching no fish. This is reminiscent of Luke 5:6-7. In that episode, the disciples learn that they will never catch fish without Jesus' help. Jesus says, “Put out into the deep water and let down your nets for a catch.” (Luke 5:4). Simon Peter replies, “Master, we have worked all night long but have caught nothing. Yet, if you say so, I will let down the nets” (Luke 5:5). “When they had done this, they caught so many fish that their nets were beginning to break” (Luke 5:6).

The disciples come to understand that their labors will be in vain if they do not have Jesus to guide them. Jesus says in John 20:21, “As the Father has sent me, so I send you.” If the disciples are going to fulfill the mission Jesus has given them, the epilogue reminds them that they will need Jesus' help. They will need his guidance. They will need the presence and power of his Holy Spirit.

“Years ago this story was sent around in a pastor's church newsletter. It's a story about a visitor to a heavy-duty grease factory. The visitors were ushered into a large room and a tour host introduced them to the company history and the number of employees at work producing

the best machine lubricants in the world. They toured the noisy factory, with lots of machinery and wheels whirling, mixing, packaging -- incredible activity.

“As the tour ended, one of the visitors said, ‘I didn't see a shipping department.’ The guide responded, ‘Well, we don't have a shipping department because it takes all the grease we make to lubricate our equipment and keep the wheels turning.’

“The pastor concluded:

“ ‘Friends, the Church is the best lubricated grease factory in all of history. What's missing is the shipping department. The church does not exist for itself; it exists to bring others to a commitment to Jesus Christ.’ ” (John E. Harnish, about his preacher friend, Stan Bailey)

We need Jesus' guidance if our church is to be more than a well-lubricated grease factory. Following Jesus' guidance, we can sail confidently into deep waters and put down our nets in the places he leads us to. In this way we can fulfill his calling, to bring others to him. He sends us out as he was sent by his Father. But we do not always recognize him.

## **II. We need to acknowledge our blindness.**

We need to acknowledge our blindness.

None of the disciples recognize Jesus at first, when they see him on the beach. Upon reading this part of the story in John's epilogue, we might remember Mary, who thought the risen Christ was a gardener the first time she encountered him. The epilogue makes it clear that it is not only Mary who fails to recognize him. It is all of Christ's disciples who continually fail to see him. And not only when he greets them in an upper room with the doors shut (20:19-23), or again with doubting Thomas present (20:24-29). But a third time, from a boat, with him standing on the shore and giving them fishing advice. John's epilogue reminds the members of his community that they are all plagued with an inability to truly see Jesus. They should not

make the mistake of thinking that they are somehow spiritually superior to Jesus' followers, or to others in their faith community. They, too, are slow to recognize Jesus' presence in their midst.

So are you and I.

“Dr. Carlyle Marney was one of the great preachers in the South during the time after the Second World War. He was a mentor and role model to many pastors. One of the stories attributed to the rich legacy he left behind took place on a seminary campus where he was invited to be the speaker for a distinguished lectureship. One of the students asked, ‘Dr. Marney, let us hear you say a word or two about the meaning of the resurrection.’ It was a fair question and an appropriate one from a future preacher to one who was already a great practitioner of the art of preaching. However, the young seminary students were taken aback by Marney's response. Dr. Marney replied, ‘I will not discuss that with people like you.’

“‘Why not?’ the students asked.

“Marney said, ‘I do not discuss such matters with anyone under thirty years of age.’ Marney continued, ‘Look at you! Just look at you. You are in the prime of your life. Full of talent and energy. Very few if any of you have experienced poverty, failure, defeat, heartbreak or a brick wall that stops you dead in your tracks. So tell me, what in God's name can any of you know of a dark harsh world which only makes sense if Christ is raised from the dead?’” (Eric S. Ritz about Dr. Carlyle Marney)

William A. Ward makes the same point, in a gentler fashion. He writes: “We should be thankful for our tears: They prepare us for a clearer vision of God.”

Rather than criticizing the blindness of others, we need to acknowledge our own blindness. We need to admit that often we do not see Jesus. Often we do not recognize Jesus’

presence among us. Often we ignore or deny the leadings of Jesus, preferring the leadings of the world around us, or the leadings of our own unhealthy desires.

In times of blindness, we need the spiritual food that Jesus offers.

### **III. We need spiritual food.**

Jesus feeding the disciples on the beach is reminiscent of John 6:1-14, when Jesus blesses five loaves and two fish and feeds the five thousand on the shores of that same lake, the Sea of Tiberias.

Jesus' resurrection beach party is also reminiscent of the Last Supper, when he washes the disciples' feet and delivers his Farewell Discourses (John 13-16). This supper on the beach corrects any misunderstanding that the Last Supper is the last meal Jesus ever has with his disciples. It is the last supper before his suffering and death on the cross. But there are many meals to be shared with our risen Lord, now and throughout eternity. Every time we share Communion, we share a meal with Jesus. Every time we share a meal with family and friends, and acknowledge Christ's presence, he is there. Jesus continues to provide the food we need, to strengthen us for our lives and for the work of the Church. Our mission is to live and work for Christ's kingdom; the meals we share with him provide the sustenance for the work to which we are called.

The meal is also a metaphor for time spent with Jesus. The food is symbolic of the nourishment that the word of God provides in the scriptures. If we read the Bible, we will be fed. If we spend time in prayer and meditation and worship, we will be fed.

Coming full circle, we know that Jesus is the living Word, that he died for our sakes, that the bread and the cup at Communion symbolize his body and his blood, offered as food for our souls. This breakfast on the beach is a rich metaphor of the whole of Jesus' purpose, the whole

of his ministry, the whole purpose and ministry and being of the church, which is Christ's body in the world. We need this spiritual food that Jesus provides. All of it. The scriptures, the church, the bread, the cup, the fish, the people of God...

On the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, Jesus asks Peter three times if Peter loves him. The epilogue brings back the memory of Jesus' prediction -- that Peter would deny him three times (13:38). We recall that Peter does so, and immediately grieves over this betrayal of his friend and Lord (18:15-17, 25-27).

The epilogue reminds us that Peter is not left in his grief. Jesus loves him always, and gives him the opportunity -- at breakfast -- to begin a new day. Peter proclaims his love for Jesus. Three times.

Jesus gives Peter an important mission. "Feed my sheep," he says. This is the divine grace of Christ -- that he entrusts the ministry of his Church to people like Peter, people like you and me; people who deny him; people who run off half-cocked; people who make horrible mistakes. And people who, through the love and grace of our Lord, Jesus Christ, always have the opportunity to come to breakfast, to share a meal with Jesus, and, when we have fallen short of the glory of God, to start anew. After all, breakfast is a morning meal, served at sunrise on a new day.

### **Closing.**

As we reflect this morning on the epilogue to John's gospel, we might want to recall the prologue, where it says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (1:1, 5).

One scholar writes:

"Every large city has a store in which there is nothing but lamps — hundreds and

sometimes thousands of lamps. Some are antique, some are new. Some are plain, some are ornate. Some of them are unplugged. Some of them are plugged in and showcasing their light.

“One day a little girl was asked by her mother which lamps she liked best. ‘I like best the ones where the light shines out.’

“There are over 300,000 Christian churches in the US. Some are antique, some are new. Some are plain, some are ornate. Some are not plugged in. And some of the ones plugged in keep their light mainly to themselves.

“God likes best the ones where the light shines out.” (Leonard Sweet)

In reading the epilogue to John’s gospel, we are reminded of our darkness... our hunger... our failure to recognize Jesus... our denial of him.

But we are also reminded that the darkness has not overcome the light.

We are doubters and deniers. We are lacking in spiritual insight. But Jesus still calls us, still feeds us, still empowers us for ministry.

The epilogue reminds us that the end of John’s gospel is not the end of the story. The resurrection stories of Jesus continue, beyond the days of the disciples, to you and me and the Church, and on into eternity. The living Word brings light into the darkness -- yesterday, today and tomorrow.

May you enjoy many breakfasts with Jesus; may His light shine out in your life; and may His light shine out in the life of this Church.

Amen.